



BLUE AND GRAY

WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

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Price 5 Cents.

DRIVEN BACK; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE'S CLEVER RETREAT.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE



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DRIVEN BACK;

OR,

The Boys in Blue's Clever Retreat.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BLUES ARE GIVEN AN OUTPOST.

"Hello, Jack! Is that you?"

"It's me, Hal Martin! Where in the world did you come from?"

"I've been trying to dodge a couple of guerillas down there in the ravine. I've had a warm time of it, I tell you."

"Where are the Blues?"

"I don't know."

"Well, we must find them! If this sort of thing keeps up General Grant will lose his company of boy scouts."

"You are right, Jack Clark. Hello! What's that?"

The ping of a rifle bullet as it glanced from the trunk of a big white oak beside the two boys caused them to dive headfirst into the nearest thicket.

"That was a close one, Jack. Whew! I felt the wind from that on my cheek."

"The Confed's are getting sassy, aren't they? Well, we will even it up with them if we ever get out of this scrape and get back to camp."

The scene was a ravine just above the little town of Oxford, Mississippi, in the cold month of December, 1862.

General Grant's Army of the West had pushed the Con-

federate line back toward the Yalobusha river. There was constant skirmishing day and night, and not a little hard fighting at times.

Jack Clark, the taller of the two young soldiers in blue, who were thus dodging the bullets of the foe, was captain of a brave company of youths who styled themselves the "Fairdale Blues."

This was because they had organized in a little town in New York State, at that time known as Fairdale.

Right from school were these boy soldiers. They had left their studies and their homes to fight for the Union.

Thus far they had met with great success, and had figured in several battles and in hundreds of exciting incidents.

Not an hour previous Hal Martin, the first lieutenant of the Blues, had strolled beyond the lines on a sort of reconnoitering trip.

As chance had it, Jack Clark, the captain of the Blues, had also gone in another direction on the same errand.

As a result, Jack Clark had stumbled upon the skirmish line of a band of guerillas. These marauding pests of warfare had been hovering about the lines of the army for a long time.

Jack Clark had proceeded to shield himself among the trees as well as he could. By the merest chance he had come upon Hal Martin, his young lieutenant

The two young officers now found that they had their hands full in the attempt to escape.

To be sure, they were not far from their own lines. At any moment a Union patrol of cavalry might show up.

But this was a chance for which they could not afford to wait. It was necessary to at once trust to their own wits.

"Can you see anything of the rascals, Hal?"

"Not a sign."

"Watch that thicket over yonder. I am going to try my pistol on it."

"Good! I hope you will find something."

Jack raised his pistol and fired at the distant clump of bushes. The result was certainly most thrilling.

There was a yell, and up from the thicket there rose the figure of a guerilla, who at once pitched forward upon his face.

A volley of rifle balls replied. But the two boys, like ostriches, had their heads buried in the leaves, and the shots did no harm.

"I tell you, Jack, we've got to get out of here. They're working around behind us, and they'll have us like rats in a trap before we know it."

"I agree with you, Hal, so here goes for a break."

Jack Clark sprung up and ran rapidly back into the woods. After him came the young lieutenant.

Just beyond was a little wooded ridge. Jack reckoned that if he could get beyond this he would be sure to make his escape.

The two boys quickly climbed the ridge. Fortune was with them. They succeeded in getting over it.

But even as they did so Hal cried:

"Look! What is going on?"

Far below, in the long valley leading west toward the Yalobusha, they saw a line of blue.

Soldiers, cavalry and infantry were marching away upon some sort of a new expedition. They watched them a moment, and the boy captain said:

"I tell you, Hal, Grant is going to make a move to attack Pemberton. Perhaps we will be ordered out ourselves."

"That's right, captain. I think we have slipped the guerillas."

"So do I."

The two young soldiers now hastily ran down the side of the ridge and soon had come to a line of pickets.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends!" replied Jack.

"Advance, friends, with the countersign."

Jack advanced, and in a hoarse whisper said:

"On to Vicksburg."

"All right," said the guard. "March in!"

The two young soldiers were soon in the Union camp. They had soon reached the tents of their own company, the Fairdale Blues.

It is hardly necessary to say that they met with a warm welcome. Tom Peters, a bluff little corporal of the company, had been on the point of organizing a searching party.

"We thought the Johnnies had got you sure," said the little corporal. "It gave us quite a scare."

"Well, they didn't," said Hal Martin, "although I'll admit it looked shaky for us for awhile. But we are all back safe. Now, what has happened since we have been gone?"

"Grant has sent out a party to try and cut off Pemberton's line above White Creek."

"Is that so?" cried Jack, eagerly. "I hope we are called to join them."

"There is other work for you," said a voice in the rear. All turned with surprise.

"Hello, Jenkins!" cried Peters. "What brought you here?"

"I am detailed as orderly for General Grant," replied Jenkins, a big soldier who had done duty on the staff of General Grant and knew his business well.

"I have orders here for Captain Jack Clark, of the Fairdale Blues."

"The deuce you have!" cried Jack. "What are they?"

The orderly handed an envelope to the young captain. Jack Clark opened it and read:

"My Dear Clark: I am making a feint movement toward Pemberton's left. I want you to take your company and march on to Black Hollow, on the Grenada road. There is a small cut in the ridge there which I want you to hold. The enemy must not be allowed to pass it. No considerable force will probably attempt to do that. But in case they do, and you are driven back, I will send you necessary reinforcements. Hold out as long as you can. I think you can do it, for I know the fighting qualities of you and your Blues.

Yours,

"U. S. GRANT, General Commanding."

Jack Clark had read this aloud, and every word was heard by those present.

"Hooray!" cried Corporal Peters, as he threw his cap in the air. "That means business. You bet we'll hold it, won't we boys?"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

All the Boys in Blue within hearing distance swung their caps and cheered. Anything was better than the inactivity of life in camp.

So it happened that the Fairdale Blues marched out to Black Hollow, some five miles away. They found the spot described by General Grant and proceeded to instal themselves there.

Jack Clark, with a keen eye, took in all the salient features of the place for purposes of defence.

He caused entrenchments to be dug, and in a very short time the Blues were ensconced in a good safe position.

"I wish Grant had given us a couple of cannon!" cried Hal Martin. "You bet we would have given the Johnnies all they wanted in case of attack."

"We'll hold them off anyway," declared Corporal Peters.

"We'll do our best," said Jack Clark. "Now I want every man to do his duty."

There was little need of this adjuration. The Fairdale Blues were, if anything, over-anxious in their respect.

Very soon they had matters ready for attack. A picket line was established and all was now ready for the foe.

The next day after taking up their new position the Blues were at roll call, when a great cry went through the camp:

"The Johnnies are coming! Fall in, everybody!"

In an instant there was excitement in the camp; but it was only for an instant.

Out of the disorder a few ringing words of command by Jack Clark brought all the boys to order. Like clock-work they fell into line and went into the trenches.

The cause of this excitement was quickly made manifest. A line of gray had appeared in the highway below.

They were Confederate soldiers, as could readily be seen. They were advancing slowly toward the cut, as if it was their intention to pass through it.

But there was a puff and a flash, and the distant report of a picket's gun came to the ears of all.

The Confederates quickly drove the picket line in. Jack Clark, with his field glass, carefully scanned the foe's line, and decided that they might number three hundred.

It did not seem necessary to send for reinforcements. The Blues, with their commanding position, ought to hold them at bay.

Fire was opened when the foe were three hundred yards away. It was quickly answered, and for a time the conflict was hot.

Then the Confederates, finding that they could not carry the pass, drew back. It was not long before they had vanished entirely and the episode was over.

The Blues were in the best of spirits.

"We held 'em!" cried Tom Peters, jubilantly. "Hooray! Who says we can't hold this outpost?"

But Jack Clark, who was always cool and conservative, said nothing. The young captain knew General Grant's tactics well enough to feel sure that they had been assigned to an important position, and that it was a dangerous one, too. They might not be as fortunate the next time in holding the foe back.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERY.

The Confederate foe had been repulsed, and Jack Clark was in his tent, when a corporal of the guard appeared and, saluting, said:

"Captain, a man has applied for admission to the lines, and wants to see you."

For a moment the boy captain hesitated, and then he said:

"Let him come in!"

It was nothing unusual. Many were wont to apply for an audience with the captain, and Jack believed that it was simply some farmer or householder near by coming with the usual complaint against foragers.

So, when a moment later the corporal entered with his

man, Jack hardly looked up from his writing, and curtly asked:

"Well, sir, what is it?"

"Be you Captain Clark?"

"I am," replied Jack.

"Wall, do you wanter ketch a Confederate?"

Jack gave a start and looked at his questioner. In all his life he had never seen a man like him.

He was a hunchback, with abnormally long arms and bandy legs. His chest was broad and powerful. His face was a strange one.

It was thoroughly animal-like in its features, indeed, more resembling that of a huge gorilla than a man.

His deep-set, crafty eyes were fixed upon Jack questioningly.

"Do I want to catch a Confederate?" asked Jack.

"Yas."

"Well, that depends upon his importance. Is he an officer?"

"He's a colonel, sah."

"Where is he?"

The dwarf cackled like a hen as he laughed and rubbed his lean hands.

"He's right here in yer camp, sah."

Now Jack Clark was interested. He looked keenly at the fellow, as if to make sure he was not crazy.

"Right in this camp?"

"Yes, sah."

"You astonish me. How can he be in this camp unknown to me?"

"Bekase he is in disguise, sah."

Jack whistled softly.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Zenas Pride. My father once owned this hull country," replied the dwarf, with a great shrug of his shoulders.

"Indeed! Where is your father now?"

The dwarf pointed skyward.

"He's gone."

It is hardly necessary to say that Jack Clark was not only interested but puzzled. This strange character and his story suddenly assumed proportions of importance in his eyes.

He knew that the story told by Zenas Pride might, indeed, be worthy of credence.

It was not at all improbable that there might be a Confederate spy in the camp. It often happened that in the guise of a peddler or some other character they gained admittance.

"So your father's dead?"

"Yas, sah."

"What do you do for a living?"

The dwarf licked his dry lips.

"I work on the levee down ter Vicksburg and sometimes on ther river boats."

"Oh, I see! Now, Zenas, if what you tell me is the truth it is of very great importance. Who is this disguised Confederate who is at present in this camp?"

"His name is Dan Darrel," said the dwarf, with a spiteful snap in his voice.

"What? Corporal Darrel?" exclaimed Jack, in sheer amazement. Incredulity was in every line of his face.

He knew that Darrel had but just joined the company. But he was a brilliant young soldier and a great favorite in the camp.

He knew nothing of his past history nor of his relations, or from what part of the country he had come.

It was enough that he was loyal to the Union and efficient in the service.

"Yas," declared the dwarf. "He's the chap. His right name is Malcolm Ford, and he's a colonel in Forrest's division of cavalry."

The dwarf spoke with certainty and with conviction. For some moments Jack was aghast.

Then, with stern tones, he said:

"Pride, if you have told me the truth I shall reward you; but if I find you have lied to me I'll hang you up by the toes."

The hunchback opened his cavernous mouth and laughed again in his cackling way.

"You will find that I don't lie," he said. "You jest take my word for it. But I reckon ye'd better get your man at once. He'll skip out if he finds I'm here."

Jack turned quick as a flash and called: "Peters!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied the little corporal, as he bounded into the tent.

"Go at once and bring Darrel here. If he offers resistance bring him by force."

Peters looked astonished, but he turned away, after a curious look at the dwarf.

It was not long before he returned and said:

"I'm sorry, captain, but Corporal Darrel is not in the camp."

"Not in the camp?"

"No, sir."

"Where has he gone?"

"I don't know, sir."

For a moment a horrible suspicion crossed Jack's mind. Could it be that the hunchback was right after all?

Was there a traitor in the little company of Blues? Was Darrel that traitor?

The dwarf cackled again and turned to leave the tent.

But Jack called out sharply:

"Hold on! Where are you going?"

"I'm goin' home."

"Where is your home?"

"I live over on the Ford plantation. I'm the foreman there." And the dwarf grinned in a sardonic way. What an overseer for a plantation, thought Jack. Certainly the negro field hands must hold him in deadly terror.

"I want you to wait until I find Darrel," said the young captain. "I want your story verified."

"Ye won't git him now," said the dwarf, with a leer. "He's done gone. He'll never come back again."

Jack hesitated a moment. He was half tempted to hold the dwarf as a prisoner until the mystery was cleared up.

But he did not do so. He was allowed to go.

Hours passed and night came. Corporal Darrel did not return.

Jack had issued orders for his arrest as soon as he stepped inside the lines. But he did not appear.

By this time Jack had begun to feel that the dwarf's story was a possible truth. As Hal Martin came into the tent the young captain called him aside and said:

"I say, Hal, I believe there is a traitor in our midst."

"A traitor!" gasped Hal.

"Yes!"

"Who is he?"

"Young Darrel, who was taken into the company at Holly Springs."

Hal Martin looked at the young captain a moment and then softly whistled.

"He is a Kentuckian."

"Exactly."

"Now, Kentucky is supposed to be loyal to the Union. I can't believe that Dan Darrel is a traitor. How did you find it out?"

Jack told of the dwarf's visit and his story.

"Why don't you put the story up to Dan, and let him affirm or deny it?" said the young lieutenant.

"I can't!"

"Why?"

"He has gone."

"Gone? Do you mean he has slipped out?"

"Zenas Pride says so. He says he will never come back."

Hal drew a deep breath. He was silent for a few seconds. When he finally spoke, he said:

"I don't believe one word of it. Dan Darrel is too clean a fellow. He is no more a Confederate colonel in disguise than I am. I don't believe he is a spy."

"Why don't he come back, then?"

"Come back?" exclaimed Hal. "Why, perhaps that humpbacked fellow has killed him. I think we ought to investigate."

"It shall be done!" cried Jack.

"I am with you. Let's try and hunt him up. If we can't find him around the camp we will go to Ford's plantation and see what sort of a place it is."

"All right," agreed Jack. "How far is it over to Ford's?"

"About two miles."

"Do you know anything about the owner of that plantation?"

"Nothing whatever."

"That settles it. It will be our first duty to visit the place and find out. Order a detail of six men. Where is Peters?"

"Here, sir!" cried the little corporal, as he entered the tent and saluted.

"Peters," said Captain Clark, brusquely, "I want you to report here in ten minutes with a detail of six men."

"All right, sir."

Peters disappeared. Lieutenant Martin now placed a map on the little camp table. He placed a finger on it and said:

"I haven't any doubt but that you understand our position, Jack. But we're in a hard place here."

"Yes?" questioned the young captain, carelessly. "General Grant told us that we must expect that before we left the camp."

"I know; but we are right in the line of advance of Pemberton's right wing. Before another forty-eight hours we may have to face a force numbering thousands. Don't you think we ought to have reinforcements?"

"General Grant has promised to send us those when we need them. The time has not yet come. I think it is well to wait until trouble comes."

The young lieutenant bowed.

"I yield to your judgment," he said; "but our scouts are continually bringing in serious reports."

"Very well! I know General Grant never would have sent us down here if he had not intended to back us up."

"You are going over to Ford's?"

"I think I'll pay the place a visit. I shall expect you to look after the camp until I return."

"All right, sir."

Just then Corporal Peters returned and made announcement:

"The detail awaits your orders, captain."

Jack buckled on his sword and thrust a couple of pistols in his belt. Thus equipped, he stepped outside the tent. The six men with muskets at present arms awaited him.

Jack took the lead, and the detail now marched in his rear.

They passed the picket line and struck out by a path which led through the woods in the direction of the Ford plantation.

This plantation Jack had heard of as one of the most valuable in that part of the South. Its owner was a strong Southern partisan, and it was known that his son, Malcolm Ford, was a colonel in the Confederate army.

But that he was masquerading in the army of the Fairdale Blues as Private Dan Darrel was something of a revelation to Jack Clark. He was determined to probe the matter to the bottom, and to learn if the hunchback Pride was telling the truth or not.

CHAPTER III.

THE MISTRESS OF THE PLANTATION.

Leaving their camp behind them, the little detail of Union boys pushed on through the Southern country. Departing from the woods, they suddenly came to a bayou, the banks of which were marshy and not easy of approach.

They skirted this bayou for awhile and had just reached a lane leading to open and cultivated fields beyond, when a startling incident occurred.

A couple of pistol shots rang out upon the air. Then, over a nearby fence came flying a handsome thoroughbred horse.

Upon his back was seated a young girl in a riding habit.

As Jack Clark gazed at her he thought he had never seen a more beautiful specimen of young womanhood.

Her figure was slight and graceful, her complexion dark, and her type of beauty was brilliant in the extreme.

But her face was pale, though fear did not show in its lines. But just as the noble thoroughbred horse she rode had started away after the leap he staggered, reeled and fell in a heap.

The young girl was thrown. In an instant Jack Clark dashed forward to help her.

As he did so he felt the wind of a bullet as it passed his temple. Turning his head, he saw four or five Confederate guerillas just in the act of climbing the fence.

It was their shots which had killed the horse. In an instant Jack pulled his revolver and opened fire.

But the scoundrels now saw the detail of soldiers in blue and scattered with alacrity for the swamp beyond.

When Jack reached the side of the young girl she was already in the act of rising. Her pale face flushed at sight of the soldiers in blue, and for a moment she seemed to regard them with apprehension.

But the young captain lifted his cap most politely and said:

"Pardon me, miss! You have nothing to fear from us. It seems that we happened along just in time to be of service to you."

"I thank you very much," she replied, in a clear, silvery voice. "But I have nothing to fear now. I am near home, and I think I need have no further trouble. Those men came upon me suddenly. I feel very bad to lose my horse."

"It is hardly safe for one of your sex to be abroad in these days of warfare and lawlessness," said Jack.

Her eyes flashed, and she replied:

"That is the fault of you men of the North. Before you came there was nothing to fear."

Jack's face flushed.

"Yet you can see that it was the partisans of your own Confederacy who were chasing you," he said. "We are Northerners, but we do not seek to annoy or assault any one."

She bit her lip and looked at him through half-closed eyes. She saw that he was a handsome youth, though he was a Northerner. Female cupidity could not resist this, so she smiled.

"In this case I have misjudged you," she said. "I am greatly in your debt. If I can repay you I shall be glad to do so, if you will come to the house."

"Is your house near here?" Jack asked.

"Yonder through the trees."

"Pardon me," said Jack. "But am I wrong in assuming that this is the Ford plantation?"

"This is the Ford plantation," she replied, with an odd twinkle in her eye. "Are you looking for any one here?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "I am anxious to see Mr. Malcolm Ford."

The young girl gave a start.

"He is my brother," she said.

"His name is Dan Darrel."

6

DRIVEN BACK.

"Your brother?" gasped Jack.

"Yes. I hardly think you will be able to see him, as he is not at home. He is a Colonel in the Confederate army, and is at present away from home."

She looked at him coldly as she spoke. Jack bowed and made reply:

"I regret very much that I will not be able to see him."

"You thought to capture him, I know. But that you will never be able to do."

Jack smiled, and said:

"That was not wholly the object of my visit here, I assure you. It was my purpose to learn if he had really been playing the part of spy in our camp."

"A spy?"

"Yes."

The young girl looked incredulous.

"My brother is attached to General Pemberton's staff," she said. "He would hardly be able to play the part you name."

"Then he does not at times pass under the name of Dan Darrel?"

The young girl's manner changed. She gave a little gasping cry and started forward. Her face was pallid.

"Dan Darrel," she exclaimed. "What is that you say? What do you know about Dan Darrel?"

There was a wild eagerness in her manner which impressed Jack greatly. At the same time it only added to the mystery of the whole affair.

"Dan Darrel was a recruit in our company," he replied. "He joined us at Holly Springs. We have since been informed that he is a spy, and that his real name is Malcolm Ford."

Her face showed surprise.

"Whoever your informant was, he has told you a falsehood," she said, emphatically. "My brother is not identical with Dan Darrel."

"He is not?"

"No."

"I could hardly expect you to admit that, for if your brother was a spy it would be natural for you to shield him."

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth," she said, firmly. "You may believe it or not, as you choose."

"Do you know Dan Darrel?"

She hesitated, and then replied:

"Yes, I know him."

"Do you know where he is at present?"

"I do not."

"You will pardon us if we search your house for some trace of Darrel, whom we must regard at least as a deserter, if not a spy."

She bowed coldly.

"I have no power to resist you," she said.

Jack now turned to his men and gave them the order to march. Then, with the young Southern girl accompanying them, they marched to the house.

It was a grand old mansion of the Southern type. Janet Ford, for that was the young girl's name, informed Jack

as they marched along that her parents had been dead for several years; that her brother Malcolm kept the plantation up until the war opened; that now he was away fighting for the Confederacy, and that it devolved upon her to conduct affairs on the place now.

Jack grew strangely interested in the fair mistress of the place. Her self-reliance and her spirit of bravery had won his deepest admiration.

They had now reached the house, and the young captain hesitated. At the steps he said:

"Miss Ford, I trust you will not consider me any less a gentleman if I seek for the deserter in your house."

"Captain Clark," she replied, "if it is your duty, by all means make the search. But I assure you that not to my knowledge is he here."

"Do I have your word of honor?"

"Yes."

Jack looked at her a moment. The light of absolute truth in her eyes settled the matter.

"I accept it," he said. "You shall not be subjected to that inconvenience."

For the first time, a gentle light of appreciation shone in her eyes.

"I thank you," she said.

"One moment," said Jack.

"Well?"

"Will you tell me what Dan Darrel is to you?"

"Yes, he is a friend."

Jack raised his cap and said:

"Good-evening, Miss Ford."

"Good-bye, Captain Clark!"

A few moments later Jack Clark and his men were marching away on the return to their camp. The young captain was convinced that Zenas Pride had lied to him. In due time camp was reached.

Hal Martin met Jack with interest, and asked, eagerly: "Well, what luck?"

"Luck!" exclaimed Jack. "None at all. Our man is not there."

"Queer, isn't it?"

"Yes," he replied. "Have you seen any signs of the enemy since?"

"None at all. A scout has come in, though, with the report that Buck Hardee, one of Forrest's colonels, is nearby with six hundred guerillas. They may attack us."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Probably Darrel is with them," he said. "Too bad he got into the company. His escape puts us in a bad light."

"That is right."

"You say Colonel Hardee is in the vicinity with six hundred guerillas and is meditating an attack upon us?"

"Yes."

"What scout brought in that word?"

"Bill Edwards."

"Tell him I want to see him."

In a few moments the scout was in Jack Clark's presence. He was a shrewd-faced fellow and wore a tattered Confederate uniform. He had penetrated to the camp of

he guerillas, and consequently had important and valuable information.

Jack made careful inquiry regarding the guerillas' camp. Then he asked:

"What do you think, Edwards? Is it possible to spring a surprise attack on those rascals?"

The scout gave a start.

"Do ye mean that, Captain Clark?"

"Of course I do."

"They're six to one."

"That does not matter. A surprise attack may be successful, even with much greater odds."

"Wall, I reckon ye kin do it. They're in camp down hyar at the forks of the road. If ye wish, I'll go along an' show ye."

"I do wish it."

Jack arose and went out of his tent. In a very few moments sharp orders had been given to fall into line and get ready for the raid upon the guerillas.

The young captain knew well the advisability of their move. He knew that it could not be long before Pemberton's advance guard would move up and perhaps attack him in the cut.

If the guerillas were not disposed of before that time they would be the cause of much trouble.

So Jack decided to dispose of them first and thus remove a dangerous foe. He firmly believed that by a surprise attack he could do this.

Very quickly the Blues got ready for their work. It was not long before they were making their way cautiously down the highway to the forks of the road, where they expected to find the guerillas.

The scout Bill Edwards was to go ahead and remove one of their picket guards, thus giving the Blues entrance to the guerillas' lines and making possible the surprise attack. With bated breath and strained nerves they approached the forks of the road.

CHAPTER IV.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

Jack Clark, sword in hand, was in the lead as they crept cautiously down upon the guerilla camp.

Edwards went forward for the purpose of disposing of the guard. The Blues waited to hear from him.

It was not long before they heard the faint sounds of a scuffle, a gurgling cry, and knew that the scout had done his work.

They crept forward and met the scout, who said, in a hoarse whisper:

"All right, boys! Go ahead!"

Jack gave a signal to the Blues, and silently they crept within the guerillas' line. In a few moments they were able to see the camp.

Then, as they crept up to the campfires, they were re-

warded with a startling spectacle. Jack gave a gasp, and gazed upon the scene with amazement.

Fully a hundred of the guerillas were gathered under a great oak tree. A rope hung from its branch, and the noose was about the neck of a pallid and nerveless man who was waiting to be hauled up into midair.

Close by him stood a figure, recognized at once by Jack with a thrill. It was the dwarf, Zenas Pride.

To his right Jack recognized the guerilla leader, Buck Hardee. It required but a glance to see what their purpose was. But what astounded the captain was the fact that the doomed man was Dan Darrel.

"Gee-whiz!" whispered Tom Peters, who lay in the bushes near Jack. "Wouldn't that surprise you? It's Darrel!"

"Darrel!" repeated Jack, rubbing his eyes to make sure that his vision was not distorted.

He could hardly believe his senses.

Was this the spy whom he had believed hand in glove with the enemy? What did it mean?

An explanation was at hand. They could plainly hear the voice of Hardee as he said:

"Wall, say yer prayers, ye cantankerous Yank. Ye won't go prowlin' around our company any more."

"I am not afraid to die," replied Darrel. "I know whose work this is, plain enough. I know that Malcolm Ford hates me, and that you, Zenas Pride, are his tool. But you will gain little by taking my life."

"You an' I can't live in ther same world," gritted Hardee. "If it'll make ye die easier I'll tell ye that the gal we both love, Janet Ford, is to be my promised wife."

"You lie!" cried Darrel, writhing in his bonds. "It is not so. She will never promise to marry you."

Hardee laughed coarsely, and the dwarf cackled in his eerie way.

"She won't refuse," he sneered. "Do ye know what I intend to do after I string you up? I'm going over to the plantation and burn the place down. I've got permission from Malcolm to do it, for he hates Janet, who, ye know, is only his half-sister, anyway, because old Ford left the place to her."

Darrel's face showed terrible despair and deadly fear and hopelessness. It was plain that he had suffered terribly.

It was all a revelation to Jack Clark. The boy captain's whole being was stirred by the words of the guerilla chief.

"The black villain!" he muttered. "I shall see that his plans miscarry!"

Hardee had now stepped back to give the word to his men to draw on the rope. Jack turned to see that his boys were ready. Then he gave the word:

"Ready, Blues! Charge!"

With a wild cheer the Blues sprung up and rushed into the camp. The guerillas, astounded, rushed to arms.

Buck Hardee, when he saw the blue uniforms, sprang back like a cat and yelled orders to his men. Zenas Pride bolted into the bushes. Jack fired after him, but missed.

In a moment Peters and half a dozen of the Blues had

reached the side of Darrel. They cut the rope, and he was safe.

The guerillas made no stand at all.

Jack Clark and his boys pursued them for some distance into the woods. Then the young captain ordered them to fall back.

They did so in good order. Over fifty horses were captured, and all the camp effects of Hardee's men.

The camp and its effects were fired. The horses were seized, and then the Blues set out on their return march.

The joy of Darrel at his rescue, it need hardly be said, was great.

When the Blues' camp was reached Jack at once proceeded to catechise Darrel. The suspected spy was a well-formed, handsome youth, with frank, open face.

"Darrel," said Jack, "will you explain a few matters to me concerning your leaving the camp?"

"I will do so with pleasure," replied Darrel.

"Very good. In the first place, why did you leave without permission?"

The youthful soldier grew somewhat red, and for a moment seemed embarrassed. But he made reply:

"I strolled beyond the lines. Suddenly the guerillas surrounded me and I was made a prisoner."

"They seemed to know you."

"Yes."

"You evaded my first question. Why did you leave the lines without permission?"

"I did not think it necessary to ask that."

"In any event, what was your purpose in leaving?"

Darrel hesitated again, but finally replied:

"I will tell you the truth, Captain Clark. I am a Kentuckian and I am loyal to the Union. But the young woman who is my dearest friend lives on a plantation but two miles from here. I was going to see her."

"Do you mean Janet Ford?"

"Yes."

Jack looked keenly at the other. He could see nothing but truth in his eyes.

"You have escaped one hanging," he said, "only, perhaps, to walk into another."

Darrel stared at the young captain.

"I don't understand," he said.

"You have been charged with being a Confederate spy."

"A spy!" gasped Darrel. Then his face flushed hotly. "Who dares to make that assertion? It is a lie!"

"We were given that story by Zenas Pride."

"Pride! The infamous man-ape! He is a monster! You won't believe him! He is a tool of Malcolm Ford."

He said that you and Malcolm Ford were one and the same."

Darrel was silent with puzzled amazement. Finally he said:

"Did he say that? What could have been his purpose? Ah, I see! He seeks my life. He thought you would hang me as a spy."

Jack's face cleared. It was all quite comprehensible to him now. A worse plot of villainy he had never known.

"I see," he said, quickly. "You and Miss Ford are sweethearts. Her half-brother, Malcolm, hates her because the plantation was left to her. He seeks your life to thwart her, and this wretch, Hardee is trying to win her for his wife."

"You have the whole story, Captain Clark," said Darrel. "I'm ready to take my oath at any time to be forever loyal to the Union. I ask you to believe me."

Jack arose and held out his hand.

"I do believe you, Darrel," he said. "It is all right. I have perfect faith in you now. I congratulate you upon having won the affections of a very charming young lady. I wish you joy."

"Our joy will be short-lived if that villain, Hardee, carries out his threat to burn the plantation."

Jack sprung up excitedly:

"You are right!" he cried. "I will send you down there at once with a detail. Tell Miss Ford that she will be safer here with us. Bring her back with you until after Hardee has been driven far enough south to make it safe."

"I will do so," cried Darrel, and he started for the tent entrance. But just then the bugle sounded assembly.

Jack sprung out of his tent and met Hal Martin. The young lieutenant was excited.

"We are about to be attacked!" he cried. "A heavy force of Confederates have come up the road and are deploying to make an attack upon us."

Jack rushed out upon a height of ground from which he could see the country below. This was plainly the truth.

Fully a thousand Confederates had appeared in the fields below. They were massing slowly at the foot of the elevation.

It was plain that they did not know the real strength of the defenders of the cut. If they had there would have been no hesitation in the attack.

Jack Clark was shrewd enough to see that this deception must be kept up. He knew that the first attack must be desperately resisted.

He at first believed that they meant to attack at once. But he speedily became convinced that this was not the case.

The darkness which was rapidly falling evidently was the reason for this. The Confederates began to go into bivouac.

But before they did this up the hill came a corporal with a flag of truce.

He advanced to the picket line, and Jack went down to meet him.

"Well," asked the young captain, "what do you seek?"

"Colonel Rollins, of the Mississippi Seventh, sends you his compliments and asks you to surrender at once and save bloodshed. He will give you favorable terms."

"Indeed!" said Jack, coolly. "That is exceedingly kind of Colonel Rollins. Return him my compliments, and tell him that I can eat him up, and if he does not at once surrender to me I will move upon his camp in the morning with a superior force."

The truce bearer departed. Jack heard no more from be-

low. But campfires were soon gleaming, and the calls of the outposts came up the hillside. What would the morrow hold?

CHAPTER V.

DRIVEN BACK.

When Jack returned to camp he met Hal Martin, whose face was troubled. The young lieutenant said:

"Looks bad, don't it?"

"How so?" asked Jack.

"Why, to-morrow they'll just walk right over us on the first attack. They have ten men to our one."

"We must fool them."

"How so?"

"Call out every man who is able to work," said Jack. "I'll show you what we will do. Did our sappers' and miners' tools come up?"

"The wagon is in the rear," replied Hal.

"Bring it up at once."

Hal hurried away to obey the order. He had full confidence in his young captain. But it seemed to him as if the outlook was bad.

But when the tool wagon was brought up Jack put the boys to work. By the light of fires they worked until past midnight.

The trenches were extended several hundred feet. Trees were felled and their trunks shaped to resemble muzzles of cannon. These were placed on the breastworks. They were blackened with charcoal from the fires.

Everything was done to make it seem that the place was heavily garrisoned. The ruse was bound to be a success.

Two flags were run up. Armed sentries paced at close intervals along the breastworks and in full view of the Confederate camp below when daylight should come.

Then, when all was done, the Blues retired to rest. They were glad enough to seek rest.

When morning came the heights fairly bristled. It looked as if a large force had come up in the night.

In view of these supposed reinforcements Colonel Rollins deemed it folly to attack. He decided to wait for reinforcements.

The ruse had worked perfectly.

The Blues laughed heartily over it. To them it was a capital joke. But to one of them it was a cause of woe.

This was Dan Darrel, the Kentuckian.

He was unable to visit the Ford plantation. For aught he knew the guerilla Hardee had already carried out his plan and Janet Ford was a captive.

He could not help a shiver at the thought. Of course Jack sympathized with him heartily, but he could see no way to give him help.

"We can do nothing until the foe in our front moves," he said.

It did not look as if Colonel Rollins meant to move. The Blues would have even welcomed an attack.

They saw now that their clever ruse might prove a boomerang.

The wily Confederate colonel was no doubt waiting for reinforcements. If they should come an attack would be made, and with such an overwhelming force Jack saw that their fate would be sealed.

So the boy captain felt that something desperate must be done.

He, however, could think of nothing save to make an attack himself. But this did not seem at the moment a safe thing.

However, it was folly to remain wholly idle, so he decided to grant Darrel's request for a detail to visit the plantation.

This gave the Kentuckian much delight. Hastily he selected half a dozen of the boys and they left the entrenchments.

Jack would have ordinarily gone with them, but he felt that this would be unwise just now, at the time when an attack from the foe might at any time be expected.

An hour passed and Darrel did not return. Hal Martin, who was pacing up and down on the breastworks with Jack, suddenly gave a start.

"Look yonder!" he exclaimed. "What do you make of that?"

Down the valley beyond the Confederate camp could be seen the glimmer of lights. In a long line they zig-zagged across the valley.

To the practiced eye of the two young soldiers all was plain.

"Reinforcements!" exclaimed Jack. "That settles it, Hal. We must call on General Grant for more men, or we will be driven back."

"Then you don't think our ruse will hold the foe back any longer?"

"Not now. They will surely attack with the morning light. We have horses. We must mount one of our best men and send him for help."

Jack Clark saw the necessity of this move at once, and he was not the one to hesitate. He quickly mounted a courier and sent him poste haste to headquarters.

In the meantime the boy captain quickly laid his plans as to what move it would be best to make now, in view of this superior force.

To fight might mean annihilation.

To retire before the foe was to give them possession of the pass. This was, of course, not so very important, as there were other points where just as vigorous a stand could be made.

Hal Martin was firm in his conviction.

"We've got to fall back, Jack," he declared. "The sooner we do it the better."

"You believe it?"

"I do."

"Well," said Jack, with reluctance, "I suppose that is our best plan. But, really, I would like to fight if I thought there was a ghost of a show."

"But there is not."

"You are right!"

Just then the two young officers heard a picket call below them. The countersign was given, and then they saw dark figures approaching.

"It's Darrel!" exclaimed Hal. "He has returned."

"Darrel! Let us see what he has to say."

Jack stepped forward quickly. The corporal and his men halted and saluted.

"Well," said the young captain, "what is the result of your expedition, Darrel?"

"We were too late," said Darrel, huskily.

"Too late?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean to say that the plantation was burned?"

"No; but it has been ransacked and deserted. She has been carried away."

Jack Clark was for a moment aghast with horror. That this awful blow should come at this moment when he was so occupied with the foe was indeed hard.

"Darrel," he said, "I hope you will bear up. I promise you that at the earliest possible moment we will get on the trail of that scoundrel."

"I thank you, Captain Clark," said Darrel, dismally. "I know my duty demands that I stay here with you——"

"Do you think you could accomplish anything alone?"

"I know that I could."

"That is enough," replied Jack. "If that is possible you are at liberty to go. I shall follow as soon as I can. When the Blues are once more at liberty I shall devote my best efforts to hunting down that Hardee and hanging him to the first tree. I can hardly spare you a detachment at this time——"

"I do not ask it, Captain Clark," replied Darrel. "I thank you for your great kindness. It is my belief that Hardee has gone to his retreat in the Big Swamp, and that he will take Janet there. It is possible that I can, by stealth or stratagem, gain entrance to the place and rescue her."

"I trust that you may," replied Jack. "May Heaven aid you, Darrel."

"Thank you, Captain Clark. I will report at the earliest possible moment."

Darrel slipped away into the gloom. Jack and Hal walked back to the tent. The young captain was in a much disturbed state of mind.

When the first streaks of dawn had begun to appear in the east the two young officers were first on the breastworks. A glance at the enemy's camp showed that they were astir.

The drums were beating, and the soldiers were rushing to roll call. The scene was an enlivening one.

"They mean to attack us at once," said Jack with conviction. "They intend to carry the pass as soon as possible."

"Can't we hold them?"

"Hold three thousand men?" cried Jack, skeptically. "I don't believe it; do you? See what a multitude there is of them!"

"Of course," admitted Hal, "we are but a handful. It is absurd. Let us fall back at once."

"Call the men to arms!" cried Jack. "Send the wagon ahead. Retire in good order to the south. We will allow them to occupy this ridge perforce!"

The order was quickly obeyed. The Blues fired a few volleys at the advancing line of the foe. Then they fell back in the best of order.

With wild cheers the Confederates came on and occupied the ridge. They were perhaps surprised when they found out the clever ruse of the Blues which held them back.

The imitation cannon and the useless lines of trenches caused them a shock. They were disappointed, for the Blues had left no supplies behind, taking, in fact, everything with them. An effort was made to drive them even further back, but the little company was now occupying another ridge half a mile away.

Jack Clark's hopes now were of reinforcements. He had no idea of holding the foe. He must be continually driven back.

The boy captain waited in vain for the return of the courier he had sent to General Grant.

"It is odd!" he exclaimed. "He would return quickly if he had executed his mission."

In their new position the Blues felt more confident. It was defended much better than the other, for the ascent was steeper.

But the Confederates seemed content with simply holding the pass. They did not at once attempt to drive the Blues from their new position.

Jack Clark realized now that the situation was fast becoming one of extreme peril. Why did not Grant send the promised aid?

The boy captain felt some misgivings. Perhaps the courier had been captured by the guerillas. He was half decided to send another courier.

But just then a cry went up from one of the pickets. Instantly all eyes were turned in that direction.

And all saw that which gave them a thrill. Deploying into the valley below from a cut far to the east was a line of blue.

"At last!" cried Jack Clark, throwing his cap into the air. "Hurrah, boys! Grant has not forgotten us."

The boy captain felt, no doubt, that reinforcements had been sent by Grant. If so, they had come in the nick of time.

"Now we can retake the ridge!" cried Hal.

But Jack shook his head.

"No!" he said. "Let them do the attacking. We will stand on the defensive and whip them."

Now the line of blue appeared in the valley. Jack saw that there was fully a thousand men.

The courier he had sent now came galloping up.

"Your orders have been obeyed, Captain Clark," he said. "I guided the reinforcements. Here are orders from General Grant."

Jack took the letter handed him by the other and read it with startled feelings.

Thus it read:

"My Dear Clark: By your request I send you a full regiment. It ought to be enough to hold the pass at Black Hollow. Keep the Confederates back at any cost. We are moving on Grenada to-day, so I can send you no more help for a time. But I feel sure you will hold out."

(Signed)

"U. S. GRANT."

Jack's face grew serious.

"No more hope for reinforcements," he said. "That is too bad. We are outnumbered yet three to one. Without artillery it will be hard to hold our own."

At this moment the colonel of the regiment and two of his officers came galloping up. He was a wiry man, with great flowing mustache.

"Captain Clark?" he said, saluting.

"Yes," replied Jack. "At your service."

"I am Colonel Chetwyn. I am glad to know you. General Grant explained to me your position. You are an independent company, and while I outrank you, I still have no authority over you on that ground. He explained it to me."

"Did he?" said Jack, quietly. "Well, Colonel Chetwyn, what do you think of our chances?"

The colonel made a wry face.

"Pretty slender," he said. "I don't believe we can hold the foe back, if they are as strong as your courier says. Grant should have sent a full brigade."

"Of course," said the young captain. "But will you tell me why he has sent us over here?"

"I think I can," replied Chetwyn. "It is to distract the attention of Pemberton on this wing of their army. A great deal depends on that, you know. Grant has some long-headed move on hand, be sure."

CHAPTER VI.

CHASING THE DWARF.

The arrival of Chetwyn and his regiment had been seen by the Confederates, and they were apparently not anxious to come on to the attack. It had the effect of causing them to hold back.

Jack was now determined to act upon a cherished plan of his own. This was to go out after Hardee.

"I want to take my company out on a little expedition," he said to Chetwyn. "I shall return in time, I have no doubt, to assist you in case you are attacked."

"All right, Captain Clark," agreed Chetwyn. "I think we can hold our ground here. I like the position."

Jack now hurried to rejoin the Blues. No time was lost.

The boys knew they were going out on the trail of Hardee, and they were greatly pleased at the prospect.

"We'll hang him before we get back!" cried Corporal Peter.

"You're right!" cried Sergeant Joe Ward. "There will be one less guerilla in this part of Mississippi."

The little company of Blues quickly set out upon the march. They soon left the camp behind.

Jack had no idea of the direction to take to find Hardee. He marched first to the plantation.

He found that Darrel had told the truth. The place was deserted, save by the negroes and their overseer, Zenas Pride.

The hunchback stood in the yard as the Blues grounded arms and waited for their young captain to make an examination of the premises.

This resulted in the discovery that Janet was gone. When Jack confronted the dwarf he asked him, sternly:

"Now, Pride, you can tell me where your mistress is. I demand that you do so."

The overseer leered in a repulsive way.

"P'raps ye think I know," he said, contemptuously. "I hain't seen her since last night."

Jack strode up to the dwarf and faced him. He looked the misshapen wretch full in the eye.

"See here, you dark scoundrel," he said, in a tense voice, "I am in no mood to trifle with you. I have enough evidence against you to warrant me in hanging you. If you know anything about Miss Ford and where she is I demand the information now."

"How should I know?" retorted the dwarf, sullenly. "She's likely gone down to Grenada, to her uncle's house."

"Has Hardee been here?"

"I dunno."

Jack turned to his boys and said, sharply:

"Bring a rope. We'll see if we can freshen this fellow's memory up a little!"

In an instant half a dozen of the Blues sprung forward. The rope noose was placed about Pride's neck, and he was led beneath a tree.

His ugly features grew sallow, and for a moment he shivered. It was succeeded, however, by a sullen glare.

"All right," he sneered. "Hang me, if ye want to. I ain't afeard to die. Thar's nothin' in life for me. I'm only a twisted up specimen of a man. Pull away and be hanged."

Jack really had no idea of taking the fellow's life. He thought for a moment of pulling him up to scare him into a confession.

But Jack could not bring himself to the thought of torturing a human body.

He said to his men:

"Let him go. He will hang himself sooner or later."

The dwarf's face was a study as he was set free. It was a mingling of surprise and selfish joy. He regarded Jack curiously, and his lips moved as if he would speak.

But he said nothing. The Blues now proceeded to thoroughly search the place.

They found nothing, however, that would serve as a clew. So finally Jack decided to follow the advice of the scout, Bill Edwards, and march into the Big Swamp in the expectation of locating Hardee's camp.

This was believed to be the rendezvous of the guerillas. Jack's plan was to creep in upon them unawares and surprise them.

The Big Swamp occupied a wide tract of land between the banks of the Yalobusha river and one of its tributaries.

Leaving the Ford plantation, the Blues marched west rapidly for two miles. They now came to low land. The arm of a bayou reached around the verge of the swamp.

It would have meant annihilation to attempt to ford this or the creek which furnished the water.

So Jack was compelled to march the Blues for some distance around the bayou, and it began to look as if the day would be wasted in this manner when suddenly one of the scouts who had been down by the water gave a start.

It was found that a large flatboat had been drawn up in the reeds, and this, it was seen, would be ample to ferry the boys across.

"Hurrah!" cried Jack. "We'll get over all right now, boys. Come ahead."

With a cheer the Blues got to work. Quickly the old scow was run out from the reeds. It was found to leak a little, but the cracks were quickly caulked with clay.

Then twenty of the Blues crowded aboard. It required several trips across to ferry all over.

The last boatload had landed when a startling thing occurred.

One of the boys gave a yell as a bullet clipped the rim of his hat. The shot had been fired from the bank they had just left.

In an instant the air was full of bullets. Jack hastily gave orders to his men to seek cover.

They were not a moment too soon. It was now seen that it was, indeed, a fortunate circumstance that had enabled them to get across, for the foe on the other side far outnumbered them.

Their uniforms were seen among the trees. That they were a detachment from Colonel Rollins' force there was no doubt.

Jack hastily deployed the Blues, and for a time answered the fire. But he finally decided that it was a waste of time and ammunition, and decided to call them back.

"They can't get at us!" cried Hal. "They can't cross the bayou. Let us go on and leave them to their own device."

"That is our best plan," agreed the boy captain. So the Blues struck out into the swamp.

For a time it was hard making their way. Then they struck into a corduroy road. Where this led they could only guess.

For over an hour they followed this road blindly. Then a clearing seemed to show ahead.

They saw a gleam of water. In a few moments Jack saw that this was a miniature lake in the very heart of the swamp.

What seemed stranger than all else was the fact that its waters were not muddy, but clear as crystal, and its bottom of hard sand.

The Blues halted here. As it was past mid-day it was decided to take a rest. Some of the Blues collected wood and made a fire.

The day was chill and the warmth was indeed welcome. For a time Jack and Hal basked by the fire.

Thus far they had come upon no sign whatever of Hardee. They did not even have a clew to guide them.

"Perhaps we're on a wildgoose chase, pard," said Hal, as he stretched himself and yawned. "I hope we are not wasting time."

"I sincerely hope not," agreed the boy captain. "It would distress me greatly if I thought so."

Jack sat at that moment where his eye was on a level with the waters of the little lake.

Suddenly he gave a start. On the far shore he saw an object emerge from some bushes and creep along for some ways by the water's edge.

It was the figure of a man.

Jack's gaze never left that figure. For some moments he stared at it intently.

The figure vanished again in the bushes. Jack rose upon one knee.

"Hal!" he whispered.

"What?"

"Did you see that?"

"Did I see what?"

"A man on the other shore of the lake. He crept along over there and disappeared in the bushes. It looked like Zenas Pride."

In an instant Hal was interested.

"No!" he replied. "I saw nothing. Are you sure you saw him?"

"I am positive."

The young lieutenant studied the distant shore for some moments. Then he said, with conviction:

"There is no doubt that scoundrel knows every inch of this swamp. He has probably tracked us all the way, and will let Hardee know of our movements."

Jack reached down to make sure his revolvers were in his belt. Then he arose and said:

"Hal, let Lieutenant Gray take charge of the camp. You and I will try to go over there and investigate."

"All right," agreed Hal, with alacrity.

They said nothing to the boys of their purpose. In a few moments they had slipped quietly out of the camp and into the woods.

They made their way cautiously through the swampy undergrowth to make a circuit of the lake. It was not long before they had reached the spot where Jack had plainly seen Zenas Pride.

There in the soft soil they found the footprints of the dwarf. They led away into the swamp.

On leaving the shore it was not possible to follow them. But the two boys kept on in the direction they assumed the dwarf had taken.

It was no easy matter to push their way through the dense brakes. But finally they emerged from the tangle and stood in a real bay.

It was not a continuation of the roadway they had followed all the morning. Of this Jack was sure.

The two boys stood there a moment undecided what movement to make, when suddenly upon their hearing there broke a familiar, cackling laugh.

Like a flash Jack turned to face Zenas Pride, the dwarf.

The misshapen wretch leered at the young captain triumphantly. With folded arms he was leaning against a tree.

CHAPTER VII.

IN HARDEE'S CAMP.

Jack Clark regarded the dwarf for a moment with interest. Pride returned the gaze coolly.

"Well," said the boy captain, "it seems we have overtaken you."

"So ye was follerin' me, was ye?" said the dwarf, with a grin. "What was ye doin' that for?"

"What are you doing down here in the swamp?"

"Watchin' you!"

"I thought so. You know this swamp like a printed book, don't you?"

"I reckon I do."

"You, of course, know where Buck Hardee hangs out in here?"

"Yas, I do!" admitted the dwarf.

"Ah! Will you tell us where?"

"Yas! It's right here."

"What?"

The dwarf laughed shrilly and sprang behind the tree, giving a shrill whistle. In an instant Jack and Hal were confronted by a startling development.

From behind trees there sprung a dozen guerillas. Every one of them held a gun pointed at the two young officers.

"Hands up!" cried the sergeant of the detachment. "Surrender, or we shoot!"

Jack and Hal had reached for their pistols. But in that very instant they saw that resistance would be folly.

With utter chagrin they recognized the gravity of the situation. They had walked into a veritable trap.

The sergeant of the guerillas walked up to them and disarmed them.

"Tie their hands behind 'em, lads!" he ordered. "We'll take 'em into camp."

Words are inadequate to describe the sensations experienced by the two young Union officers.

It was an appalling thought that they were in the power of Hardee and his men. They knew the guerilla chief's proclivities well enough to be assured that he would never allow them to escape alive.

Death would almost certainly be their portion.

They were now led away along the swamp road. Zenas Pride accompanied them, and said, jeeringly:

"Yer boys will never get out of this swamp alive. Hardee has things fixed to wipe 'em out."

Of course this gave the boys a chill of horror. It is hardly necessary to say that they were sick and faint at heart.

For some distance they were marched along the corduroy road. Then suddenly they saw the white canvas tents of an encampment just ahead.

It was Hardee's encampment. As the boys were led by the pickets they saw that the guerilla chief had a large following.

The camp scene was not unlike any other. The prisoners excited some interest as they were led through the camp.

The guard halted before a tent somewhat larger than the others. In another moment a man stepped from it.

It was Hardee.

The guerilla chief gave a start at sight of the prisoners. His face flushed and his eyes blazed.

"What's this?" he roared. "Ye've got the two Yanks, have ye? Wall, I'll be hanged! This is ther biggest piece of luck yet."

"We caught 'em prowlin' round in ther swamp," said the sergeant.

"Ye kin thank me fer that!" piped Zenas Pride, shrilly.

"Nebbe!" growled the sergeant. "We brung 'em in, just the same."

"Shut up yer quarrelin'!" growled Hardee. "Tie 'em up to ther trees thar. Is thar any more of 'em out thar?"

"The hull caboodle!" cried the sergeant. "Over a hundred of them."

"That settles it! Call out every man in the camp. We will go down and surround 'em," yelled Hardee. "We'll hang every one of 'em on ther trees around hyar."

At once the two young prisoners were marched to a couple of trees near by and bound to them. The scene in the guerillas' camp was now one of excitement.

The order to go down and attack the Blues brought every man from his tent. Jack estimated that they were fully five hundred strong.

In a few moments they were in line. It looked as if the camp would be almost deserted.

Hardee went around from tent to tent whipping out laggards.

"We want every man!" he growled. "Them blue-backs kin fight like demons. We want every man!"

A guard was left for the prisoners. This was the only man left in the camp, save two other guards stationed before a small tent some distance away, and the picket guard far beyond.

As the guerillas hastened away upon their enterprise it is hardly necessary to say that the two young officers were left in a desperate frame of mind.

It was a horrible reflection to them that they were in the hands of the foe. And what was more, the sort of foe who would give them no quarter.

They understood Hardee's nature well enough to feel sure that he would not hesitate to hang them.

Thoughts of escape, of course, occurred to them.

The departure of the guerillas in force, leaving only a

small guard, had at first given the boys a slight feeling of hope.

Yet, their bonds were too tight to force. They could see no way of getting away from the tree to which they were bound.

Jack Clark regarded the single sentinel who paced up and down before them.

He was of slightly different type from the average Mississippian. It occurred to the boy captain to speak to him.

"I say, guard!" he called out. "Can I speak to you?" "What do ye want?" he asked.

"You're not a Mississippi man?"

The guard gave a little start and looked at Jack curiously.

"Eh? What of that?" he asked, sharply.

"Well, only curiosity, that's all. I think the Tennesseans are a shade better looking, for my part."

Jack saw in an instant that he had hit a responsive chord.

"Wall, that's what I am," replied the sentry. "I warn't raised on an ague-tricken mud flat. My folks are good Tennessee farmers."

"Yes; I could see at a glance that you were not of that stamp."

The guard's egotism was tickled.

"Whar be you 'uns from?" he asked.

"We are from New York State."

"Oh, yas! Wall, them are ther best people in ther North, ain't they?"

"Well, we think so," replied Jack. "I say, friend, it's tough being tied up here like a couple of trussed chickens."

The sentry shouldered his musket.

"It's orders," he said.

"Yes, I know. But can't you loosen us up a little? You needn't be afraid of us. You're armed, and we're not."

The fellow made no reply. He stalked up and down, and Jack saw the lines in his face harden.

He saw that it was of no use to try to work the point with him.

"I say, friend," said the boy captain, again, "what's the use? There's no future for you down here. Just help us out of this scrape—"

"Kain't do it."

"Why?"

"Hardee would hang me."

"He'll never know anything about it."

"How's that?"

"You come along with us, and we'll get you something better than this in our army. Now, that's the truth. The North is going to win."

The sentry was silent for awhile. He paced up and down. But Jack saw that he was undecided.

The young captain now proceeded to push the question with all his might.

"I tell you it will be the best thing you ever did," he said.

"No," replied the sentry, with sudden decision. "I'm sorry for yo Yanks; but I can't do it. Ther South will win, an' I'm goin' ter be on ther right side of ther fence."

Jack looked at Hal.

The young lieutenant's face was pale and eager.

"I say, captain," he whispered, "you can't do business with that guard. Look yonder at that bunch of wild azaleas."

Jack's gaze followed that of Hal's. He saw a clump of swamp azaleas but twenty yards away.

And in the foliage he saw framed a face. For a moment the young captain was startled beyond expression.

He recognized that face.

It was Dan Darrel.

The young corporal was making gestures now with one hand. Then he disappeared.

Both Jack and Hal knew that this had an important meaning. They felt a thrill of hope.

They waited and watched. After awhile they saw the sentry reach the end of his beat and turn his back.

The very instant that he did this from a bush behind him glided a silent figure. The sentry half turned, but he was too late.

Darrel's fist struck him a terrific blow behind the ear. The sentry gave a yell and then went down in a senseless heap.

The two sentinels in front of the other tent of course heard it.

Instantly one of them started for the spot. He fired, and the bullet just missed Darrel.

But the latter, quick as a flash, had grasped the fallen sentinel's musket and drew aim. The oncoming sentry threw up his arms and fell as the report of the musket rang out.

The other sentry remained where he was and began preparing to fire. But, very coolly, Darrel stepped up and cut the bonds that bound Jack and Hal.

"Darrel!" cried the boy captain, with intense joy, "I am indeed glad of this. You came just in the nick of time."

"I am glad of that," said Darrel. "We have only one man between us and the rescue of Janet."

"Do you mean it?" cried Jack, with great delight. "Is she in yonder tent?"

"She is!"

"I suspected it. What a combination of lucky circumstances for us!"

"You are right. You are not armed, but here is a pistol for each of you. I have this fellow's musket, and I will reload. Let us work quick!"

But the remaining sentry had now started full tilt for the woods. The field was won.

Jack and Hal led the way on the run for the tent. As they neared it the flap opened, and a colored woman appeared.

She regarded the boys with surprise.

"Wha' yo' do around heah?" she demanded, arms akimbo. "I done reckon yo' is Yankees."

"We are!" cried Jack. "Where is the young woman whom Hardee has been tryin' a prisoner?"

"Glory be to God!" screamed the wench. "De young

missus is done tickled to death. She am been hopin' dat somebody would jest come to take her away from dis place."

"Well, we're here for that purpose!" cried Jack. "Tell her to come out at once."

But the tent flap widened, and Janet Ford stood in the entrance.

CHAPTER VIII.

DECEIVING THE FOE.

The young Southern girl was pale but resolute. As she saw the blue uniforms color came to her cheeks.

Darrel had dashed past the two young officers.

"Janet!" he cried, "at last we are once more united. This is the work of Providence."

With a joyful cry she rushed into his arms. Jack and Hal now began to explore the tents to find arms.

They knew that their best plan was to at once get as far away from the guerillas' camp as possible.

But the boys were anxious, of course, to rejoin the Fairdale Blues.

A hasty consultation was held.

"If you are anxious to get back to your boys, which is but natural," said Darrel, "you can go at once. I know this swamp very well. I am going to at once strike out for our lives and rejoin Grant's army, so as to place Janet in a safe place. It is no longer safe for her in the lines of the Confederacy. Her half-brother, Malcolm, would only turn her over to Hardee."

"Do you think it will be possible for you to do that?" asked Jack.

"I think so."

"Well, perhaps you are right. If you accompany us to rejoin the Blues you will be going right toward the foe, and might be recaptured."

"That is it!" said Darrel. "This plan, of course, I adopt only with your permission."

"You have it."

"Thank you. I will return and report to you at once, after I have secured her safety."

"That is all right, Darrel. I will give you leave of absence."

"God bless you, Captain Clark. I will never forget your kindness."

"That's all right, my boy."

Janet advanced and held out her hand. Her face was flushed with great happiness.

"Captain Clark," she said, with emotion, "I will never forget your kindness. You may rest assured of that. It is greater than I had dared hope for."

"I wish you much joy, Miss Ford," said the young captain.

Then Darrel, with Judy, the colored woman, and Janet with him, struck out into the woods.

Jack and Hal now did the same, but going in an opposite direction. Very soon they were again in the corduroy road.

They now heard the distant sounds of firing.

They knew well what it meant.

"Come on, Hal!" said Jack, as they pushed on. "All depends on getting our boys out of the swamp now. It is our only hope."

"That's right, Jack."

Soon they once more came to the little lake. Beyond its surface they saw the flash of rifles and heard the yells of the combatants.

It was apparent that the Blues were giving Hardee's men all they wanted. As the two young officers ran on they became impressed with one fact.

The Blues were retiring northward.

Jack first discovered this.

"We've got to go the other way, Hal!" he cried. "We'll head them off and avoid rushing into the hands of the foe."

So they set out around the other side of the lake. On ran the two boys, until they finally reached the upper end of the little sheet of water.

Then they turned in the other direction, and in a few moments saw the rearguard of the little company of Blues.

There was a rousing cheer when the young captain and his lieutenant appeared on the scene.

Lieutenant Gray had handled his men most admirably.

With consummate skill he had brought them into line, and they were holding the guerillas in fine style.

But as Jack appeared on the scene he greeted him with delight.

"Oh, I am glad you have come, Captain Clark!" he cried. "I was just about making up my mind that they would get the best of us."

"You have done well, Walter!" cried Jack, warmly. "No one could have done better. Have we lost any men yet?"

"Four have been killed."

Jack felt a tug of regret. But he knew that this was part of the horrible game of war. He at once took charge of the company, and now the Blues increased their efforts to resist the guerillas.

For over an hour the running fight was kept up.

The Blues had the advantage of the trees as a means of shelter. In this way the mortality was kept down.

But the guerillas were too overwhelming in force, and it became plain that the Blues must soon get beyond the swamp and on to higher ground, where a stand could be made.

Suddenly they came to the corduroy road. At this point the road crossed a wide creek.

The bridge was a rude affair of logs. As soon as Jack saw it he conceived a plan to hold the foe back.

The Blues hastily crossed the bridge.

Massing on the other bank, they kept up so hot a fire that the foe could not cross. The fight became desperate.

Jack Clark knew that his hopes depended upon getting across the bridge and holding the foe back until it could be destroyed.

A murderous fire swept the guerilla line as it came charging down.

It became necessary for them to fall back. It was now time to act.

Jack sprung up and cried:

"I want volunteers to rip up the bridge and set it on fire!"

In an instant a score of the boys sprung forward. Sergeant Joe Ward and Corporal Peters offered to lead them.

Forward they dashed.

In a few moments they were on the bridge. With rapid hands they ripped up the boards and piled them in the center.

They were fired, and then the little volunteer party dashed back.

So well did the Blues keep the guerillas back that only one man lost his life on the bridge. In a few moments the flames were mounting skyward.

The bridge was doomed.

Great sheets of flame rose from the pitchy wood from which it was built. Suddenly, with a crash, it went down into the current.

Baffled yells arose from Hardee's men. They tried time and again to cross the bridge before the flames got headway.

But each time they were hurled back by the deadly, concentrated fire of the Blues.

"We've whipped 'em!" shouted Tom Peters, as he swung his cap and cheered. "Hooray for the Union! We've fooled 'em in good shape."

"What will Hardee say when he gets back to his camp?" exclaimed Hal. "What will he do when he finds us gone, and Miss Ford, as well?"

"There'll be lively doings," agreed Jack. "I fancy he'll get pretty mad."

"I should say so."

It is needless to say that the two young officers felt exultant. The guerillas could not cross the creek without great risk, so they retired.

When he was satisfied that they had done so Jack gave orders for the Blues to fall in and march.

The afternoon was wearing away. They marched on rapidly for an hour until they came out of the swamp.

To their surprise, as they mounted the nearest rise of land, they saw the buildings of the Ford plantation.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Joe Ward. "We're not so far from where we started."

"That's true," agreed Jack Clark. "But what is that down below there in the edge of that grove of trees?"

"A Confederate flag!"

This was the truth. Of course it indicated a Confederate encampment.

What was more, this lay right in their path. Jack was nonplussed.

"We're badly stuck," said Hal. "If we try to go around that encampment we can't get back to Chetwyn's camp before dark, if not before morning."

"Well," said Jack, "it depends upon how large a force there is down there. It is probably an outpost of Colonel Rollins' Confederate army."

"But—is it safe to risk an attack until we know?" asked Hal.

"Hardly!"

"Suppose we send scouts down there?"

"Very well."

This plan was at once adopted. Scouts were detailed and sent down through the woods.

The Blues secreted themselves along the ridge of land. A road led over this, and here, behind a high ridge, they secreted themselves.

A half hour elapsed, and then the scouts returned. The report they made was most discouraging.

"There is a heavy picket guard along the base of the hill," they declared. "We can't get beyond it. The trees are so dense that we can't estimate the strength of the foe."

For some moments Jack was nonplussed.

Then Hal said:

"Let's risk an attack."

But Jack shook his head.

"No," he said. "We will try the effect of a ruse upon them."

"A ruse?" exclaimed Hal.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Peters, take a couple of men and prepare to skulk down there in the woods. Draw the fire of the picket guard. Wait until the guard is called out. If they send a detachment after you, draw it along up the road here toward us. When you get most to the summit drop your guns and run."

"All right, captain!" cried the cheery little corporal. "Your orders shall be obeyed."

In a few moments Peters reported with his men.

"One thing more!" said Jack. "I want you to take mail bags with you. That will make them think you are carrying despatches, and they will be all the more eager to capture you."

This was done. The three volunteers thus equipped set out.

Down the hillside into the cover of the trees they crept. It was not long before the corporal had sighted the picket guard.

Peters exposed himself cautiously. Instantly he heard the challenge:

"Who goes there?"

Then the alarm was given. The corporal of the guard appeared, and the picket was heard to say:

"There are Yankees over in the woods there. You had better get after them."

At once the alarm was given. Peters and his companions saw gray uniforms coming out of the woods. It was now time to act.

They ran out into full view and started up the road.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTURED.

The loud shout of the Confederate lieutenant was heard: "Halt! Surrender, ye Yankee dogs, or we'll shoot ye!"

"Keep right on, boys!" said Peters to his companions. "Don't pay any heed to that."

And they did so. The Confederate officer seeing their mail bags, cried:

"They've got despatches. We've got to have 'em, boys!"

Up the road they ran, a full score of them. Peters and his boys kept ahead. It seemed to be the Confederate officer's desire to capture them alive, for he did not order them fired upon.

Nearer drew the detachment. The three Blues had now reached the summit of the hill.

"Ready, boys!" said Jack Clark to his men in ambush.

The game worked to perfection. The Confederate detachment, in their eagerness to capture the three boys in blue, ran into the deadly volley of Jack Clark's boys in ambush. It was a terrible surprise.

The Blues rose in a line and poured a destructive fire into their ranks. Then Jack Clark sprung down and shouted:

"Surrender!"

At once the remainder of the Confederate detachment threw up their arms and shouted:

"We surrender!"

In another moment they were under guard and being marched back of the ridge. Here Jack proceeded to question them.

The lieutenant of the squad was quite an intelligent man. He answered Jack's queries without reservation.

"We are only a company of Colonel Rollins' regiment," he said. "The colonel is going to attack the Union soldiers in the morning. We had orders to hold this road."

"Very good," said Jack. "Are you willing to give us your paroles?"

"I am, if the others are."

A quick canvass of the detachment was made. A few demurred, but when it was explained to them that they would have to be sent to Paducah they decided to yield.

"I'm durned sick of the war, fer one thing," said one of the Confederates. "I'm ready to go back to my farm."

"You bet my wife and children will be glad to see me," said another.

"I've fit for Jeff Davis eight months now, an' I reckon I've done my duty," declared a third. And so it went on.

Jack accordingly set them adrift. Whether they went back in the ranks or not he never knew.

But he did know that it would not have been wise for him to have taken them along as prisoners.

The country was poor, and barely afforded sustenance for troops, to say nothing of prisoners. So Jack would have given them their liberty anyway.

He deprived them of their guns and cartridges. In a few moments they had vanished from sight.

Now it was a question as to what had better be done. Hal Martin was in favor of an immediate attack.

"We've got to get back to Chetwyn at once," he said. "If he is attacked in the morning he will need us."

"That's right," agreed Jack. "There'll be hot fighting, no doubt."

So it was decided to move down and attack the Con-

federate camp. At once the Blues deployed under cover of the trees. They made their way cautiously down the hillside.

Of course the fate of the detachment had become known to the Confederates in the camp below, and they had come out strong along the picket line.

There was no doubt that they would soon have moved to the attack themselves and rushed up the hillside had not the Blues gone down. In a few moments shots were exchanged.

Then the firing became hot.

Closer the two lines drew. Jack Clark's purpose was simply to get through and return to Chetwyn's camp. So he endeavored to avert a prolonged battle.

The Confederates now fell back before the Blues' advance.

One thing now worried Jack. It was the fear that Confederate reinforcements might arrive. They would cut him off and prevent his return to Chetwyn's camp.

So he forced his line along as rapidly as possible. Finally he decided on a quick charge.

The order to fix bayonets was given, and the Blues were given the word:

"Charge bayonets!"

It was always a tradition with the Northern boys that the Southern soldiers did not like cold steel.

So, as the line of glittering steel went flashing down through the trees the gray line broke and fled.

The fight was over. The Blues swept through the ravine, scattering the foe right and left. They gained the height beyond and rested.

Then an ominous sound came to their ears. It was the distant boom of guns. The battle was opened.

To Jack this was inexplicable. He had been led to believe that it would not begin until the next morning.

But the booming of the guns settled all doubts.

"Come on, Blues!" shouted the young captain. "We must get into that battle!"

With a mighty cheer the Blues plunged forward. Down the road they went at the double quick.

The shades of night were falling when they came to a little bridge which spanned a stream. On the other end of the bridge was a house half built into the bank.

Jack noted this and called his Blues to a halt, as he had no desire to walk into an ambush.

He gave orders to Peters to take a couple of men and go ahead reconnoitering. By this time the Blues were on the bridge.

They had got half across when into the roadway at the end rolled a couple of cannon. Into their muzzles the astonished soldiers looked.

All had been done in the twinkling of an eye. Jack Clark saw the game.

The foe had waited until they were well on the bridge and then had sprung their ambush.

A volley from the deadly cannon would sweep most of the Blues into eternity. What was more, Jack saw that the heights beyond swarmed with Confederate soldiers.

They were trapped.

Instinctively the Blues wheeled, only to see cannon and the foe at the other end of the bridge.

They could not have walked into a neater trap. Aghast, they looked at each other.

The order to charge was upon Jack Clark's lips, but he hesitated to give it.

He saw at once that it would be worse than murder to send his boys into the jaws of such certain death.

The bridge could be raked from both ends and every man in the company killed.

"My soul!" gasped Hal Martin. "It's all up with us, Jack."

"It looks bad," admitted the young captain. "I'm afraid we're in for a term in a Confederate prison, Hal."

"That will put us out of the war."

"Unless we can escape."

"That will not be easy."

"That is right."

Jack stepped out before his men.

"Boys in Blue," he said, earnestly, "we have fought with honor thus far in this great war. It looks at this moment as if our fighting days had reached an end. The enemy have entrapped us absolutely. There is nothing left to do but to die or surrender. As it is possible many of us may live to escape and do further service for the Union, perhaps it would be better to surrender. Let me know your voice in the matter."

"If you surrender it need be with no sacrifice of honor. If you prefer to die, I am ready to die with you."

A cheer went up from the brave boys.

"We obey our captain," was the cry. "If he chooses to surrender, we surrender; if to die, we die with him."

Jack was deeply touched by this devotion. He turned and walked toward the end of the bridge.

A harsh voice reached him.

"Stand back thar, Yank! Do you surrender, or shall we eat you up?"

"We surrender as prisoners of war."

At once the Blues proceeded to lay down their arms. On to the bridge swarmed the foe.

The Blues were matched from the bridge in a single line, while the Confederates confiscated their muskets and effects.

It was a terrible blow.

But Jack Clark knew that it was only one of the vicissitudes of war and could not be helped.

They could only make the best of it and hope for the future. To be sure, that was light consolation. But it was something.

On the other side of the bridge the Blues found themselves in a large Confederate camp.

A heavy force, part of Pemberton's main army, had come up to reinforce Rollins. It was a gigantic force to oppose to the slender regiment of Chetwyn.

Of course Chetwyn must be driven back. It was all very inexplicable to Jack Clark. He wondered where General Grant could be.

But he had sufficient faith in the great general to believe

that he knew what was for the best, and would bring all things out well in the end.

As the Blues, in the evening light, filed off the bridge, Jack saw an officer standing in the door of the toll house.

He was darkly handsome, but there was an evil light in his eyes and a cruel sneer about his lips.

He wore the shoulder-straps of a brigadier general. Jack might never have thought of the matter again had not another figure appeared on the scene.

Who should this be but the dwarf, Zenas Pride. For a moment the misshapen wretch stared at Jack.

Then he gave a great cry:

"See," he cried, pointing to Jack. "There he is, General Ford! He can tell ye where the gal has gone. He's the chap."

In an instant Jack guessed the truth. This young colonel, lately raised to the rank of brigadier general, was no other than Malcolm Ford.

For a moment the young captain gazed at the raw-boned brother of Janet Ford with much interest.

He saw at a glance why Janet could not live safe on the plantation. Here was an evil spirit ready to drag her.

"The scoundrel!" muttered the young captain. "He looks it every inch!"

Ford had fastened his gaze on the young Union captain now. He seemed to be evilly exultant, and raising his hand shouted:

"Bring him in here! Bring the Yankee captain here!"

In an instant half a dozen sprung to do his bidding. They grasped Jack by the shoulders and marched him into the toll house.

Zenas Pride, chuckling and crowing, was a witness. He leered at the young captain, and hissed:

"Ah! We'll see ye stretch rope, all right. It's a long road that has no turn!"

CHAPTER X.

A HARDENED VILLAIN.

"That's right!" cried Jack, sternly, "and the road you are following, sir, will soon have a turn."

"What's that?" sneered the dwarf. "A turn for the better?"

"No."

"Oh, ye're tryin' yer prophecies on me, are ye? Well, let me tell ye they won't work, that's all."

"Is that so?" jeered Ford, now putting in his ear. "Let me do a little talking. Let the prisoner in."

Into the toll house Jack was led.

He gave a start as he saw that the main room of the place was half filled with Confederate officers.

At a word from Ford, however, they all went out. The Confederate general sat down on an empty cask.

A lantern hanging from a beam had been lighted. Ford looked his prisoner over carefully.

"So you're Captain Jack Clark, eh?" he asked. "How is it that you claim the right to meddle with my sister's affairs and mine?"

"The right that any true man will claim in defence of the weak and helpless."

"You are a fool!"

"I return the compliment."

Ford gritted his teeth savagely. He glanced at Jack and muttered:

"I'll hang him, if I have to hang for it myself."

Jack heard this remark, but he said nothing. Ford muttered something else, and then asked again:

"Where is she?"

"Who?" asked Jack.

"You know well enough! My sister."

"She is unfortunate in having you for a brother."

"Ah! I'll take it out of you for this later on; have no fear. Now tell me where she is."

"Do you think I am a fool?"

"I know where she is."

"Then why do you ask me?"

"She has gone off with Darrel, that little Yankee corporal. She's dead in love with him. Faugh! A Southern girl must have a strong stomach to marry a Yankee."

"In this case the Southern girl is highly worthy of her choice," said Jack, quietly.

"What!" roared the villain. "That's a hanging matter! Make no slurring remarks on our women! I could kill you for that."

Jack looked Ford square in the eye.

"You are a coward and a villain," he declared. "Any man who will do as you have done is entitled to no consideration. To think that you would turn your sister over to such a wretch as Hardee!"

"Before we go further, let me tell you that she is not my real sister."

"She is your half-sister."

"Yes."

"Very good. It matters little about that. It would be as well if she were a stranger."

Ford laughed sardonically.

"You'll laugh out of the other side of your mouth by to-morrow," he said. "Mark my word on that. I tell you, by this time to-morrow Dan Darrel will be carrion for crows, hanging to one of these fine trees hereabouts."

"First catch your hare!"

"He is as good as caught. There is little chance for him to escape!"

Jack felt a sick chill of repugnance to this grasping, soulless fellow. He understood well his selfish purpose in thus persecuting his half-sister.

The boy captain would have much liked to thwart him in his plan. But the outlook was dubious.

He was himself a prisoner. It looked as if his imprisonment would be a long one. The chance for a rescue was remote, and a for escape, it seemed unlikely.

But Jack Clark was not the one to lose heart. On the contrary, he was on his feet, and ready for the first chance.

Ford had turned to give the order for Jack's removal, when the dwarf Zenas bounded into the room.

His apish face was contorted with joy, and his voice was high and shrill.

"They're caught, General Ford! They are caught! It's all over! The guard is just bringing them in!"

In an instant Ford was on his feet.

"Who, you fool?" he thundered. "Speak up! Who have they got?"

"The gal! Both of 'em!" screamed the dwarf. "Here they come!"

Jack Clark felt sick and faint at heart. He could hardly believe his senses when he saw the guards enter the room. Between them were two prisoners.

One was Dan Darrel. The other was Janet-Ford. Her face was ghastly pale.

Ford himself, sneering and jubilant, stood staring at them. It was his moment of triumph.

"Well," he said, tensely, "you have come over to see me, have you?"

"Malcolm Ford!" said Janet, in a ringing voice, "I demand that you set us free. You have no right to hold us prisoners!"

"Haven't I?" said Ford, sardonically. "If I haven't, who has? I am the natural guardian of my sister. I have the right to dictate to her what path she shall pursue in life."

"I deny that statement."

"It matters not what you deny. At the present outlook you will hardly be able to avert it."

"Now, as for this fellow with you, he wears a blue uniform. I believe I have a right to hold him as a foe to the South."

"I am your prisoner!" replied Darrel coldly. "I don't care what you do to me, but be good to her."

"Don't preach to me!" snapped Ford. "My nerves won't stand it. I shall turn her over to Hardee!"

"What!" exclaimed Jack Clark. "That is infamious! No, no! It must not be!"

"What interest have you in this matter?" said Ford, coldly. "I warn you not to meddle with affairs that don't concern you."

"You are an inhuman fiend!" cried Jack, hotly. "No decent man would do such a thing as that. Hardee is a deep-dyed scoundrel, and unfit to stand in her presence."

Ford, white and cold, turned to Zenas Pride.

"Pride," he said, "I put you in command of a detachment to hang this fellow at daybreak. Yes, hang both of them. As for my friend Darrel, here, I am reserving him for another fate."

Zenas grinned in a diabolical way.

"All right, General Ford," he said. "I'll see that your orders are carried out."

"If you fail me I'll order you hung up. Do you see?"

Ford snapped his fingers, and a detachment of four soldiers entered.

"This man is appointed in authority over you until further notice," said Ford. "You will obey his orders."

"All right, general," said the corporal in charge of the soldiers. He was a burly fellow with a bushy beard, and had keen, black eyes.

Zenas, in a pompous way, now advanced, and said, shrilly: "Fall in! Prisoners in the centre!"

There was no alternative.

"Good-by, gentlemen," said Ford, with a smile. "I wish you a pleasant journey to the hereafter."

"Brother!" gasped Janet, gaspingly, and with terror in every line of her beautiful face, "you will not do this awful thing. It is murder! It is contrary to the rules of human warfare. These men are officers in the Union army. They have a right to be treated as prisoners of war."

Ford looked at his half-sister with a fiendish light in his eyes.

"Do you think I am a fool?" he gritted. "They have tried to thwart my plans in every way. Now that fate has kindly placed them in my hands I would be indeed a fool to permit them to escape."

"But—it is murder—"

"Bah! Don't talk to me! So is war nothing less than murder in all its phases. Take the prisoners away!"

"Wait!" she cried, almost fiercely.

"Well?"

"These men must not die! I offer my life to you in their stead!"

Ford laughed in a discordant way.

"Very heroic!" he sneered. "Of what advantage would that be to me? You forget that you are all prisoners of mine."

Breathing heavily, Janet stared at her inhuman brother.

"I cannot believe that you have one spark of humanity in your nature," she said. "This is beyond human ken."

"Take the prisoners away!" growled Ford.

Jack and Hal were marched from the bridge house. The dwarf, Zenas Pride, preceded them.

Through the Confederate camp they were marched, and to a little dell among the trees. Here Pride caused the guard to make a fire.

The prisoners were bound to the trees. An armed guard stood before each.

Pride chuckled, and said:

"Ye won't escape this time, now, you can bet. I'll look out fer that."

The burly corporal of the guard, however, did not seem to relish the authority which Pride displayed. It was not long before it was quite evident that the two would clash.

Jack and Hal, bound to the trees, were for a time much in the dumps.

It was not a pleasant reflection to them at all that they were thus tied up, like calves waiting for the slaughter.

They also thought of their brave Boys in Blue, who were under guard in another part of the camp.

On the morrow they would be marched away to Southern prisons.

All their brave work in the war thus far would, of course, stand to their credit. But there would be no more of glory or achievement for them.

It was a hard situation.

But, yet, neither Jack nor Hal were of the sort to yield to despair. They still clung to hope.

They knew that somewhere Grant was preparing to crush Pemberton's line. At any moment his victorious legions might descend like a thunderbolt upon the foe.

In that case, unless they were executed in the morning, there would be a chance of rescue.

All these thoughts flashed through the minds of the two boy prisoners.

As they stood there bound to the trees they conversed upon the subject, and each drew inspiration from the hopefulness of the other.

The guards paced up and down, not heeding their conversation. And thus the night hours wore on.

The great camp fire roared. Just a little way beyond was the picket line.

The Confederate soldiers of the detachment were making themselves comfortable about the fire. The December nights were chill, even in that latitude.

A pack of cards had been produced, and a high game was in progress.

Corcoran, the corporal, was the leading spirit and seemed to be winning.

Zenas Pride, the dwarf, sat by, a spectator. Suddenly, as Corcoran began to rake in some of his winnings, the dwarf leaned forward, and in his cackling voice cried:

"I say, boys, he's fleecing ye! He's already cheated ye out of that last hand."

CHAPTER XI.

THRILLING INCIDENTS.

In an instant there was a sensation. All eyes were turned upon Pride.

The dwarf pointed to Corcoran's right hand, and said:

"He's got extra cards there! He's playing it low-down on ye!"

"You're a liar, you human gorilla!" fiercely yelled the corporal. "I'll break ye in two for that!"

The dwarf only grinned.

"I saw ye!" he said, accusingly. "Ye passed a card into yer hand. It ain't fair to play that way."

Corcoran was now upon his feet.

His face was swollen with rage and hate. He drew a wicked knife from his belt. He started toward Pride.

But several of the detachment stepped in front of him,

"No, ye don't, corporal! It ain't a fair shake. He's a cripple. Take a man that's all sound and a match for ye."

Corcoran sheathed his knife with a growl. But Zenas now stepped forward. There was the same changeless grin on his face.

"Are yer goin' ter give ther boys back their money?" he asked.

"No!" retorted Corcoran. "I won it, and it's mine."

Zenas drew his contorted figure up and opened his cavern-

ous mouth with a frightful hiss. He looked like a veritable demon at that moment.

"Ye'd better do so," he gritted. "If ye don't I'll take it out of ye!"

Corcoran's eyes glittered.

"Ye see, boys," he said, "it ain't my fault. He's lookin' for trouble. It's none of my seekin'. We've got ter have it out."

The Confederate soldiers looked at each other. They saw that Zenas had become the aggressor.

The long, sail-like arms of the hunchback were being wildly flourished. He was glaring at Corcoran in a baleful way.

Even as the soldiers stood in indecision the dwarf shot forward like an arrow. Corcoran had just time to meet his attack.

The dwarf sprung into the air like a cat, and before Corcoran could dodge him had flung his lean legs about his waist.

His arms were wound about Corcoran's neck in a desperate grip. His talon fingers sought his windpipe.

The giant corporal was a child in the hands of the dwarf. Only once did he make use of his hands. Then, in the right hand, the blade of his knife flashed.

It seemed as if the blade had been sunk into the body of the dwarf. But if so, it had no apparent effect upon him.

Corcoran swayed and went down. The next instant Zenas was upon his feet.

Corcoran lay quietly on the mossy ground. He did not attempt to rise.

One of the soldiers sprung forward and bent down over him.

In an instant he arose. His face was pale as he said: "He's dead, comrades!"

"Dead?" was the general cry.

"Yas! His neck's broken like a pipe-stem."

For a moment there was silence. Zenas seemed to be in some distress. He swayed and leaned against a tree a moment.

"Ther general won't like this," said one of the soldiers. "What kin we do, comrades?"

Zenas turned, and the glare of his baleful eyes was terrible to see.

"Do?" he hissed. "Obey my orders! Fall in, every one of ye! March to headquarters and bring a surgeon and a stretcher!"

There was a moment of hesitation.

A pistol gleamed in the dwarf's hand. He was a terrifying object.

"I'm in command here!" he gritted. "Will ye go, or not?"

At once the men fell into line.

Without further word they proceeded to march away. The two guards in front of Hal and Jack hesitated.

"You, too!" commanded the dwarf. "Fall in! I'll take keer of ther prisoners."

At once they complied.

The line of men disappeared in the darkness. The dwarf was alone with the prisoners. For a moment he stood looking at them.

Then he started toward them, only to sink down as if faint. With an effort, however, he struggled to his feet and placed a hand to his side.

His face was ghastly, even death-struck, and the boys saw now that he must be wounded badly.

"I killed him!" he said, as he crept nearer the two prisoners. "Ye saw that. He deserved it, as ye well know. But he has given me a death-blow, too. Yes, I'm done for."

He gasped for breath a moment. His tenacity was wonderful.

"I'm a miserable specimen of humanity, am I not?" he continued, in failing tones. "Ye don't know what I've had to stand. Ye are men of perfect mold. I'm a human scarecrow for boys to jeer at and dogs to bark at."

"I've hated all mankind, and I've had reason, for they've hated me. I've never done any one a Christian deed, and ye're the only ones that ever did a kind act to me. Do ye remember when ther rope was around my neck over there to Ford's plantation? Ye gave me my life."

"I haven't forgotten it. All ther while since then I've been playin' the game fer ye. I took charge of ye to-night and brought ye here to save ye. I knew I was the only one could do it."

"Thet corporal stood in the way. I had to dispose of him. Ther time has come, and now I kin set ye free. Yas, I'm goin' ter set ye free as ther last act of my life."

It is hardly necessary to say that the boys had listened to all this with sheer wonderment.

They did not know what to say.

"Do you mean that, Zenas?" cried Jack, eagerly. "If you will only help us, I will see that you are well paid."

The dwarf made an impatient gesture.

"Thar's no reward due me," he said, in a hollow voice. "Only pray fer me."

With this he bent forward and drew his hand quickly from his side. A great jet of blood spurted forth, and in his hand the boys saw the dripping knife that Corcoran had planted in his side.

The dwarf leaned forward, and with a mighty effort slashed the ropes which bound the boys.

Then he sank down in a heap.

In an instant the two prisoners had freed themselves.

Jack quickly bent down over the dwarf and raised his head.

But a glance was enough. Zenas Pride, after performing the only good deed of his life, had gone to his final account.

There was no time to lose.

The boys knew well that not a moment of time must be wasted. At any moment the guard might return.

Their stacked muskets were near by. They each took one and a cartridge box.

Then they started away into the gloom. In the darkness their uniforms could not be told from gray. They boldly approached the picket line.

The picket put down his bayonet and said, sharply: "The countersign, gentlemen?"

"We haven't got it," replied Jack. "We are scouts going to Pemberton's camp. We shall not return."

The picket had no orders to stop anybody going out of the lines, so he stepped back and saluted.

The two young Union prisoners passed quickly on into the darkness.

But they had gone scarcely one hundred yards when they heard an uproar in their rear. Their escape had been discovered.

They dashed on in the darkness at random. For a time sounds of pursuit were in their rear. Then they died out.

Exhausted, the boys finally sank down under a rail fence. Here, in a clump of bushes, they remained, and, succumbing to exhausted nature, fell asleep.

When they awoke the gray light of dawn was about them.

Jack was just about to rise, but in an instant he sank back.

"Great Cæsar!" he gasped. "Get down! Get down, Hal! We are lost, if they happen to see us!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just look down the road!"

Hal peered out of the bushes. He gasped with terror. A Confederate column was marching toward them.

For a moment the two boys felt as if all was up.

They were barely hidden by the little screen of bushes under the rail fence. The Confederate column must pass within a dozen yards of them.

All around them were open fields. There was no other cover within reach. They could only crouch where they were and trust to Providence.

For one moment Jack considered the possibility of a dash for freedom across the fields.

Then he saw that it was too late.

CHAPTER XII.

TO THE RESCUE.

Crouching in the bushes, the boys waited with bated breath for their fate. At the moment it seemed to them as if it was all up with them.

Nearer drew the Confederate column.

They were marching with arms at rest. In advance rode a colonel on a black horse. The first line of gray had reached the line of the boy's vision, when they were given a thrilling start.

Behind the line of gray was one of blue. In a long file marched a column of Union prisoners.

They were the Fairdale Blues.

"Great Cæsar!" gasped Jack. "Do you see that, Hal? It is the boys!"

"Our boys!" ejaculated Hal. "Oh, if we could only do something now to rescue them!"

But this was not possible.

The Blues, with their escort of Confederates, marched

by with regular step. They were on their way South to a Confederate prison.

With thrilling emotions, Jack and Hal in their hiding place watched them.

There was no visible way at present to give them aid. In a short while they had passed by.

When they were out of sight Jack and Hal sprung up. The two young officers knew that there was work for them to do.

Jack saw that the Confederate guard with the prisoners did not number above one hundred.

He knew that at that moment they were not far from Chetwyn's position. If they could reach his camp, no doubt the Union colonel would send a sufficiently heavy detachment to lie in wait for them and capture the Confederate guard.

Thrilled with this possibility, the two boys leaped the rail fence.

On ran the boys.

Across the fields and over fences they went. Far off in the distance they saw the guidon of Confederate cavalry.

"I'll bet that's Hardee's guerillas!" gasped Hal. "It won't do to fall into their hands."

"No!"

Anxiously the two boys kept their eyes on the guidon as they went on. But fortunately it did not come their way.

Soon they had passed around the ridge. From this point now they could see the ridge where Chetwyn had been.

And as they gazed upon it they gave a great cry of joy. There they saw the Union flag proudly waving.

It meant much to them.

So they ran on over the ridge as fast as they could. It seemed an age before they finally began to climb the other side and saw the Union pickets.

As they advanced one of the pickets gave his hail. Jack at once replied:

"We haven't any countersign. We want to be taken at once to Colonel Chetwyn."

At once the picket line sent out a call for the guard. In a few moments the sergeant and his men appeared.

The boys fell in, and were marched quickly to headquarters. They met Colonel Chetwyn just coming out of his tent.

The colonel gave a great start.

"Hello, Clark!" he cried. "Where in the world did you come from? Where are your men?"

Jack at once, in as few words as possible, told his story. The colonel listened, spellbound.

"You say your boys are being marched away to prison over yonder?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Jack.

"That settles it! We will rescue them. Are you sure that there is no heavy ambush out that way?"

"I am sure of nothing," replied Jack. "But I think if you can give me one hundred and fifty men I can bring the Blue Line to camp."

"You can have twice that number if you desire. I will give you as heavy a detachment as you wish."

"I think that number will do," said Jack. "I will start at once."

In a few moments the boys were on their way with their detachment. They had soon crossed the ridge, and were hastening rapidly southward.

Jack would have been exceedingly glad if they had been mounted. But as they were not, he was bound to make the best of it.

One of the soldiers was very familiar with the region.

He at once selected a road which he said was a short cut, and should result in heading the Confederate guard off before night.

Jack learned that word had reached them from General Grant.

Evolutions were yet being made, with Vicksburg as the objective point. But it was not yet time to start on the southward march.

In the meantime Pemberton was reported to be falling back to Grenada.

"All right," cried Jack, "let the merry war go on. We will be in at the finish, I reckon, if we succeed in rescuing the Blues."

"And we will succeed!" cried Hal. "In our lexicon there is no such word as 'fail.'"

"You're right!" cried the boy captain. "It is a case of we will win."

So with high hopes they pressed on.

At noon they made a brief rest in a farm yard. A couple of chickens were found, and also a stray porker.

A quick job was made of roasting these. An appetizing meal gave the soldier boys renewed courage.

They now pressed on once more. The scout who had brought them through the short-cut road suddenly exclaimed:

"There are the forks over there. If they have not reached them before us we shall head them off."

"Let us get there at once!" cried Jack. "We ought to be able to tell by the condition of the road."

"We can, I think," replied the scout. "I have no idea that they have got ahead of us. Only mounted troops could have done that, I am sure."

In a short while now they reached the forks. It was a lonely place in a clump of trees.

The two roads crossed each other here in a diagonal course. At once Jack proceeded to examine the road.

If a company of soldiers had passed that way they would surely have left footprints in the highway. None such were to be found.

"Hurrah!" cried Hal. "They have not come along yet. Let's lie in wait for them."

Very quickly plans were made.

The Union troops secreted themselves in the copse on either side of the road.

Time passed slowly.

A horrible idea suddenly occurred to Jack.

"By gosh!" he exclaimed, "suppose they have turned

off on to another road? We may be waiting here for nothing!"

"That's so!" cried Hal. "That will make it bad, indeed."

But just at that moment, and while things were at a decidedly low ebb, a distant comprehensive sound was heard.

It was the tramp of feet.

It was about two hours past noon. Looking out of his concealment, Jack Clark saw the head of a column coming into the woods.

He recognized them at once as the Confederate guard of the Blues.

"It's all right!" he said. "They're coming. Let every man be ready now. We'll give them a hot welcome."

The Union soldiers crouched down in the underbrush and waited.

Nearer drew the advance guard.

When they were exactly opposite Jack sprung up and gave the order:

"Ready, fire!"

A destructive volley leaped into their ranks. Almost in the same instant Jack gave the counter order:

"Fix bayonets! Charge!"

The Union line came down from the roadside like a whirlwind. The resistance was most feeble.

The Confederate colonel held up his arms and shouted: "We surrender!"

It was a quick and decisive victory. In a moment the line was broken and the rescued Blues were about their captain and lieutenant and cheering madly.

"I thought we were in for it sure!" cried Tom Peters, as he fairly embraced Jack. "We were terribly in the dumps, for we thought they had taken both of you out and shot you."

"Oh, no!" declared Jack. "We escaped, with the assistance of Zenas Pride."

"The assistance of Zenas!" cried one of the boys. "I thought he was your enemy!"

"So did I!" declared Hal. "But the poor wretch had more gratitude in his being than I ever dreamed of."

Then he told the story of the fate of Zenas. The Blues listened with deepest interest to it.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGAIN DRIVEN BACK.

But Jack was now eager to know about the fate of Darrel and Janet Ford.

"Joe Ward can tell you something about that," said Peters. "Joe saw them take Darrel away."

"Yes, I can," said the sergeant. "They led Darrel away. But I can't say that they shot him."

"And the young girl—?"

"I think Ford held her a prisoner in the toll house at

the bridge. When we left there he was still stationed there."

"Ah!" said Jack. "Then our duty is plain. We must go back and report to Chetwyn. Perhaps he can be induced to swing his regiment over that way and surprise Ford."

"You'll have to have more than a regiment," said Peters. "Ford has a full brigade there."

"What is he holding that bridge for?"

"I believe it is Pemberton's only avenue of escape from Grant's right wing."

"By this time Chetwyn ought to be a part of Grant's right wing," said Hal.

"That is right," said the scout who had led them to the forks in the road. "Grant is swinging west by south. You'll see some fighting in a few days, unless Pemberton escapes down the other bank of the Yalobusha."

It was, however, quickly decided that the best possible plan was to at once march back to Chetwyn's camp.

The Confederate prisoners they had captured must be disposed of. Probably Chetwyn could send them to the rear.

But Holly Springs had been captured by Price, and this had complicated matters, so that it might become necessary to parole them.

"Well, at any rate," decided Jack, "we will march back to camp. Certainly we cannot stay here."

So they were quickly under way.

Part of the Blues were equipped with the captured muskets of the Confederate guard. The others could not be equipped until Chetwyn's camp was reached.

Once more they were under way, and rapidly making back tracks.

It was nightfall when they climbed the ridge to Chetwyn's camp and were admitted through the picket line.

They found the colonel in a decidedly anxious frame of mind. He was delighted to welcome the Blues and indeed glad they had been rescued.

But he said, glumly:

"Rollins has been reinforced again. He has now three thousand men. He means to attack me in the morning, I know."

"Let him do so!" cried Jack. "I believe we can give him a great fight."

"He has great odds over us."

"Well, never mind that. I feel sure we can hold him."

"I am glad to see you so optimistic, Captain Clark," said the Colonel. "Courage is everything, I know. But the odds are too much for us."

"Yet we must not give up."

"Oh, no! I have no intention of doing that. If the worst comes, we can at least retreat."

"Yes!" cried Jack. "And at any moment General Grant's right wing may reach out and include us."

"At any rate," said Chetwyn, with an assumption of better spirits, "we will do our duty. That is all a soldier can do."

"That is all that is asked of a soldier."

So that night the soldiers of Chetwyn's regiment slept on their arms. The picket line was advanced as far as was dared, and every precaution taken against a midnight surprise.

But it was yet an hour before sunrise, when the darkness was most intense, that the guns of the pickets were heard.

In an instant the whole encampment was aroused.

The Blues were at once in line, for they had slept on the ground in instant readiness to rise. Colonel Chetwyn now showed that, while he was an efficient officer otherwise, he could not handle a desperate emergency like the present.

He seemed almost paralyzed with the problem before him. Nearly everything was left to the discretion of the captains of the various companies, for the lieutenant colonel was shot dead at the first attack.

The foe came up on both sides of the ridge. Jack saw at once what their game was.

It was to, if possible, get in on both sides and envelop the Union force.

Jack knew well the movement to make to baffle this. In the face of such overpowering numbers it was to withdraw by the right flank and thus present a new face to the foe.

This would obviate the danger of an attack both front and rear. All of the enemy's force must now be applied in front.

To remain where they were would certainly be fatal. Yet this seemed the purpose of Colonel Chetwyn.

Jack knew that it would not be in good taste for him to approach the colonel with any proposition or advice. He could only grit his teeth and hope for the best.

But there were others who shared the young captain's opinion. One of these, the captain of a New Jersey company, said:

"Don't you think we ought to take this thing into our own hands, Clark? I don't believe the colonel is competent."

"I can see no safe way to do it at present," said Jack.

But just then the storm broke. The Blues, with three other companies, were fighting desperately on the left. Again and again they hurled the charging line of Confederates back.

But this sort of thing could not go on forever.

A corporal came running up with thrilling news. It went along the line like wildfire.

"Chetwyn has been shot dead!"

The colonel had met his death. It was in order to do something at once. A hasty council of the captains was called.

The lieutenant colonel and all officers down to the grade of captain had been killed.

A hasty vote was taken, and it was unanimously proposed that Jack Clark should fill the position. The boy captain had no desire for the honor thus thrust upon him.

But it was a desperate moment. Something must be done. So Jack at once gave the order to retire.

The regiment changed front and began to withdraw. In a few moments it was over the ridge and in skilful retreat.

Before the Confederate foe in the darkness really knew what the evolution meant they had reached the other height.

Then Jack held the pass only long enough to enable his men to retire to the road beyond. Here he felt that he could make a running fight.

For that they must be driven back was a certainty. It would be madness to try to hold out longer against such odds.

When the sun burst above the horizon the Union regiment had fallen back in good order for four miles. So skilfully had this been done that the foe had lost heavily but the Blues only a scattering number.

Much praise was due Jack Clark for his clever work, as all were bound to confess. He was cheered to the echo by all.

Charge after charge was made by the pursuing Confederates. But each time they were hurled back.

Then, while collecting themselves for a larger attack, it was only to find that the elusive foe was half a mile away.

Thus Jack Clark's skilful tactics kept them continually at bay. But this sort of thing could not go on forever.

It resulted in the Confederates finally drawing off and abandoning the pursuit. Then the Union regiment filled the air with their cheers.

Though they had been driven back, it was all in the nature of a great victory for them.

It is hardly necessary to say that full credit for it all was given to Jack Clark. Certainly it belonged to him.

But now they had reached the verge of the Big Swamp. Jack felt a thrill as he saw the road which he knew led into the swamp and across the bridge held by Ford and his brigade.

The temptation was powerful for the boy captain to go in and attack the Confederate force there. But he knew that he could hardly hope to succeed against such overwhelming odds.

"It's no use, Jack!" said Hal. "I'd like to do it myself. But I tell you that we'd get licked."

"I wish we had another regiment."

"So do I."

"We must do something, though. Rollins has given up and is retiring. I am almost tempted to pursue him."

"It wouldn't be a bad plan."

"But, to tell you the truth, Hal, I'm mighty interested in poor Darrel. I'd like to see him win out."

"I think every boy in our company would, too," said Hal, "but we can't throw away the whole regiment to do it."

"No, that's right."

So the matter was undecided. But, even while looking for a solution of the problem it solved itself.

A vidette who had been sent down the road now came galloping up. He was much excited.

"A heavy force of Union soldiers are coming this way from the east," he declared.

"What's that?" cried Jack, with wild inspiration. "You are sure of that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come on, Hal!" cried the boy captain, as he started for a nearby elevation. "Let us see if they are a part of Grant's advance guard."

At once the two boys hastily climbed the elevation. When they were half way up they got a view of the country to the eastward.

They saw that the vidette had told the truth. A long blue line, which seemed to extend for miles, was stretching across the country.

That it was Grant's advance moving down to Vicksburg, they were sure.

"That settles it!" cried Jack, exultantly. "I think the game is over. The next thing in order is to trap Ford."

"How can we do that?"

"In a simple manner!" replied Jack. "I will send a courier to the general of the advance guard, asking him to hurry forward a brigade to follow this road into the swamp and attack Ford. I will send him a map of the position."

"Then, with our regiment, we will cut around and approach Ford from the rear. We will force him to surrender."

"Clever!" cried Hal. "I have no doubt it will work."

Jack was not disposed to lose time. He quickly despatched the courier. Then he at once gave his men orders to march around the swamp to enter it from the other side.

It seemed almost a certainty that Ford must be caught between the jaws of a trap.

There was only one thing that disturbed Jack Clark. This was the fear that the villain Ford had already disposed of poor Darrel.

It was one thing to catch Ford, but an impossible thing to resurrect Darrel if he had been shot. Yet Jack was hardly disposed to believe that Ford had yet done this.

CHAPTER XIV.

A COWARD'S WORK.

Certainly there could be nothing sure about the accomplishing of Darrel's rescue. But Jack was hopeful.

The regiment rapidly fell back until they came to the swamp road.

Then they were quickly in the swamp. Pushing forward rapidly, they had not gone far, when a great cry arose from the guard in advance.

A patterning of bullets came from the depths of the woods ahead. The cry went up excitedly: "The guerillas!"

It was true that they had run across a detachment of Hardee's men. In a few moments a hot fight was under way.

But the guerillas were driven back. The Blues now pressed forward eagerly.

Three cannon were stationed in the middle of the road. The moment the regiment swung into view the muzzles of the cannon belched flame and smoke.

Down into the Union ranks came that storm of shell. A dozen of the advance line were hurled into eternity.

Jack Clark's horse was killed under him. The Blues, in confusion, fell back. The gunners could be seen ramming home cartridges for another volley.

But Jack Clark acted quickly.

With loud commands, he deployed his men into the woods. The next shower of shell did little harm.

Now the Union regiment dashed forward, determined to take the battery. From behind the trees on either side they poured in a deadly fire.

The result was that the gunners were shot at their pieces and there was a desperate attempt made to haul them away.

But the Blues, with a rush, reached the road again, and with bayonets hurled the Confederates back and captured the guns.

They turned them about quickly to send a volley after the foe. But, to their chagrin, they found that the wily foe had spiked them.

Infuriated by this, the Blues now gave chase to the Confederates. They charged along the road, until suddenly Jack saw that they had come to the bridge held by Ford.

The boy captain was so jubilant that he whirled his sword aloft and rushed ahead, shouting:

"Come on, boys! We have them whipped already! Let's drive them into the river!"

But at this moment troops were seen rushing across the bridge. Tremendous volleys shook the air of the swamp.

The Union soldiers were thus compelled to halt. But Jack cleverly ensconced them behind trees and stumps, and kept up a hot and destructive fire.

But the Confederates were massing heavily, and the boy captain knew that they would soon be pressing his line back.

"It's about time for the brigade to come up on the other side!" cried Hal. "If they would only put in an appearance now it would be a relief, wouldn't it, Jack?"

"Well, I should say!" agreed the young captain. "But we'll cling to hope. Perhaps they will come."

"If they don't—"

"Why, we will be driven back again, that's all. It has been our fate thus far."

"I have noted that," replied Hal. "But, I say! Do you hear that?"

"I think there is firing on the other side of the bridge."

Jack listened intently. The guns on the other side made so much of a clatter that he could not at once tell. But presently he plainly heard the sounds of conflict on the other side.

The firing drew nearer. Then they saw the Confederate soldiers crossing the bridge in confusion.

"It's all over!" cried Hal, suddenly. "We win! Look at that!"

The Blues sent up a rattling cheer.

There was good reason for this. A white flag was seen suddenly to appear at the end of the bridge.

At once firing ceased. The next moment a color-sergeant with a white flag came marching down from the

He brought the announcement of the surrender. Jack received him, and said:

"We will send a detachment to take possession of your camp. Parade your men, and let them stack their guns and prepare to march out."

The color bearer departed. In a few moments Jack and Hal, with a detachment of fifty men, marched up to the toll house.

There they met six of the Confederate officers, colonels and lieutenant colonels. But Ford was not visible.

General Wesley, who had come up on the other side of the bridge with his brigade, now put in an appearance.

He greeted Jack warmly.

"I have the news of your brave work from your courier, Clark," he replied. "You have certainly done nobly, and are entitled to great credit."

"I thank you, General Wesley," replied Jack. "There was nothing else left for me to do after poor Chetwyn was killed."

"Well, you certainly have done heroic work," said General Wesley. "You will no doubt be given a colonelcy."

"No," replied Jack; "that I do not seek. I prefer to remain with my company."

"As simple captain?"

"Yes."

"That is very odd, for usually military men are looking for an advance. We all seek promotion."

"Nevertheless," said Jack, "I am not in the service for that purpose. I left home to fight for the Union. I am fighting for a principle, and not military honors."

Wesley looked at him wonderingly.

"You are an unusual man," he said.

"Perhaps I am," agreed Jack. "But I have my ideas on the subject. I prefer to serve through the war with my Boys in Blue. After the war is over, no more military life for me."

General Wesley extended his hand.

"You are a true patriot," he said. "I understand and appreciate your sentiments. But, now, what disposition shall we make of these prisoners?"

"Is it true that your brigade is a part of General Grant's advance?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then why can we not march these prisoners to the rear and have them sent back with others?"

"We can! But I know our division commander don't like to spare even a small detachment."

"I am afraid he will have to in this case. We can't turn these fellows back into the Confederacy and fight them over again."

"By no means. Well, let us have a talk with their officers."

They now approached the Confederate officers, who at once stood ready to tender their swords.

"Keep your swords, sirs," said General Wesley, magnanimously. "I will not take them from you. But are none of you of higher rank?"

"None, sir," said the color-sergeant.

skipped out. He left us here to shift for ourselves, while he got out to make sure of his personal safety."

"What is his name?" asked Wesley.

"His name is Malcolm Ford."

Wesley gave a sharp exclamation.

"I understand it all now!" he said. "I can understand well enough why he got out. If I had caught him I would have hung him to the first tree."

Jack was surprised.

"You know Ford?" he asked.

"Indeed I do!" replied Wesley. "He killed our truce-bearer with his own hand at Iuka. He is the most dishonorable man I ever knew to wear shoulder-straps."

"I have a great desire to meet him myself," said Jack.

"Is that so?"

"Yes; he has done a very cowardly thing by his half-sister and a certain member of my company, Dan Darrel, who is also the young woman's sweetheart."

"How did he get away?" asked Wesley.

"He made his escape down the creek yonder in a canoe when he heard your guns," replied one of the Confederate officers. "He will be reported for it, be sure."

"How long has he been gone?"

"Perhaps half an hour."

"Send a detachment to overtake him!" cried Wesley. "Bring him back so that I can make an example of him."

"Pardon me, general," said Jack. "With your permission myself and my company of Blues will make that detachment to catch him."

"Very well," agreed General Wesley. "Then you will report later?"

"I will."

Jack now turned to one of the Confederate colonels and asked:

"As a man of honor, I ask you to tell me what was the fate of the prisoner Darrel, and General Ford's sister?"

"He took his sister with him," said the colonel in reply. "The prisoner Darrel made his escape."

"His escape?" gasped Jack, with a thrill of great joy.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

This was indeed most welcome news to Jack Clark. But he inquired again:

"You say Ford took his sister with him. Did she go willingly?"

"No."

"Ah! Did he depart with her alone?"

"No. He had two men with him. He said that it was his purpose to find Hardee and bring him to our aid."

"Did you place any credence in that?"

The Confederate colonel shrugged his shoulders as he replied:

"Indeed, no! We would have been glad if Ford had left us a week ago. You would not have got in on us so easy."

"Then you do not consider him an efficient officer?"

"We do not. If he remains in the service much longer he will be court-martialed. He is to be rapidly left."

Jack held out his hand.

"Shake hands on that!" he cried. "I believe every word you say. What is more, I'll tell you that if I catch him I'll hang him."

"I wish you luck."

Jack was indeed chagrined that Ford had made his escape. But he was determined to overtake him.

"Rally the Blues! Detach them from the regiment. We will turn the command made vacant by Chetwyn's death over to the choice of the regiment. We have got to have Ford at any cost."

"All right, captain."

Hal departed to carry out the order.

It was not long before the Blues were detached and ready for the pursuit of Ford. As quickly as possible they got under way.

They proceeded to follow the course of the creek. They knew that Ford in his canoe, with such a start, was a number of miles away.

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH WINDS UP THE TALE.

Jack knew that the start obtained by Ford was not of such great importance after all.

The creek had many windings, and the course across the country being straight ought to enable them to cut down the lead greatly.

The creek was the same that flowed through the Ford plantation. Jack somehow conceived the idea that the plantation was Ford's objective point.

It was not believed that the villain would attempt to leave the creek while in the swamp. It was undoubtedly his purpose to drift out of the swamp and then go ashore.

However this might be, Jack felt sure of finding him in the vicinity of the Ford plantation. What was more reasonable than that he should seek these familiar quarters for a secure hiding place?

So the boy captain set his course out of the swamp in as direct a line as possible for the plantation.

On pressed the Blues at the double-quick.

They pushed through the undergrowth, climbed over fallen trees, skirted miry depths and dark morasses. For over an hour they pushed on before the swamp gave way to high ground.

Then they came out to higher land. They soon saw the buildings of the Ford plantation just ahead.

A file of negroes were passing through the field. At sight of the Union soldiers they dropped their baskets and began to sing a hallelujah song.

It was their simple belief that the Yankees were coming to give them freedom and absolute immunity from toil always thereafter.

Jack knew that any information he could get from them would be reliable, so he called one of them over.

He was a white-haired old patriarch, who answered Jack's questions without a bit of hesitation.

"Now, look here, Uncle Wool," said Jack, brusquely, "we

are looking for your master, Ford. We know he is around here somewhere. Now, where is he?"

The old negro made a sweeping bow and then replied:

"Yo' jes' axes de right man, massa," he said. "He am down yonder in de cotton mill wif some of his sojers. I done fink his sister, Missy Janet, am wif him, too."

"That settles it!" exclaimed Jack, excitedly. "Come on, boys! Deploy and surround the place! Don't let him get away!"

Very quickly the Blues spread out in a semi-circle and closed in about the rude structure.

As they drew near they heard excited voices.

Jack, now, with Hal walked forward and approached the open door. Within the structure was a sort of little court yard where the negroes baled the cotton.

Jack threw the door open.

The sight which he beheld was a thrilling one. There were six inmates of the place.

Three of these were Confederate soldiers. One was Janet Ford, the other Malcolm Ford. The other was Dan Darrel.

The latter was bound hand and foot, and stood on a platform under a heavy cross-beam. A rope hung over the beam. In the rope was a noose.

Janet Ford was bound to a cotton bale.

Malcolm Ford was cutting the air with his sword and crying excitedly:

"This is what you get for trying to cross me. I am going to hang him right before your eyes, sister mine."

"As for you, Friend Darrel, you may die with the certain consciousness that your beloved sweetheart will before another twenty-four hours become the wife of Buck Hardee."

"All this you get because you defied me. This plantation is now mine. After the war I shall return here and put a hundred niggers to work on the place. I'll be the biggest man in Mississippi."

"At the present moment you are the most despicable," said Darrel, coldly. "I will show you that I am not afraid to die."

"Oh, Malcolm," pleaded Janet, in the wildest of abandon, "listen to me! Don't do this awful thing! The plantation shall be yours! I will claim nothing. It shall be all yours."

Ford turned with an imprecation.

"A good time to treat with me now, when all is mine anyway," he gritted. "It is too late, my dear sister. You cannot save your lover. He is doomed."

"No, no!" she screamed, wildly, struggling to free her hands. "I appeal to you men. Will you stand by and see such a horrible thing done? I beg of you to save him. Oh, save him!"

Then her frenzied gaze turned toward the door, and she saw Jack Clark.

With one wild shriek she cried:

"Saved! Oh, thank Heaven! We are saved!"

Ford turned as if on a pivot. The moment he saw Jack and Hal he turned ashen pale, and his knees seemed to sink beneath him.

The true cowardice of his nature asserted itself at once. Instead of assuming the aggressive, he turned and ran for the opposite door of the cotton mill.

"Come back, you coward!" shouted Jack. "You can't escape that way!"

But the villain flung himself through a window. But it was only into the hands of a number of the Blues. He was instantly a prisoner.

The three Confederate soldiers threw down their arms and surrendered. The game was up.

Hal had sprung forward and cut the bonds of both Darrel and the young girl. Once more they rushed to each other's arms, and this time they were not to be again separated.

Grovelling abjectly and begging for his life, Ford was brought back into the cotton mill.

Jack ordered him securely bound.

"I have no idea of taking your life, you coward!" he declared. "I am going to deliver you up to General Grant. He can order you shot as a spy if he desires."

Ford grew calmer as it occurred to him that possibly he might yet escape punishment. But Jack kept him very closely under guard.

All now repaired to the plantation house. Once more Janet took charge of her own.

The negro servants, who loved her well, had all remained, and soon the place was in running order. For the rest of the day the Blues were guests of honor there. The young mistress would have detained them much longer.

But Jack said:

"We must go back and report to General Grant. We shall go on to Vicksburg from here. As for Darrel, I will give him sick leave to get over his wounds. I wish you much happiness."

The Blues marched away a few hours later. The next day they reported to General Grant. The prisoner Ford was sent to Paducah and died in prison.

Darrel and Janet were happily married. The young corporal returned to fill out his term of service. He is still living on the plantation with his wife in happiness and contentment.

As for the Blues and brave Jack Clark, they embarked upon new adventures, of which we will write in another story.

THE END.

Read "TURNING THE TIDE; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY ON TIME," which will be the next number (28) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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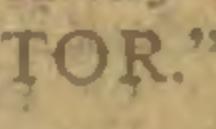
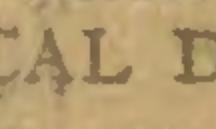
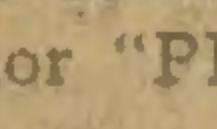
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